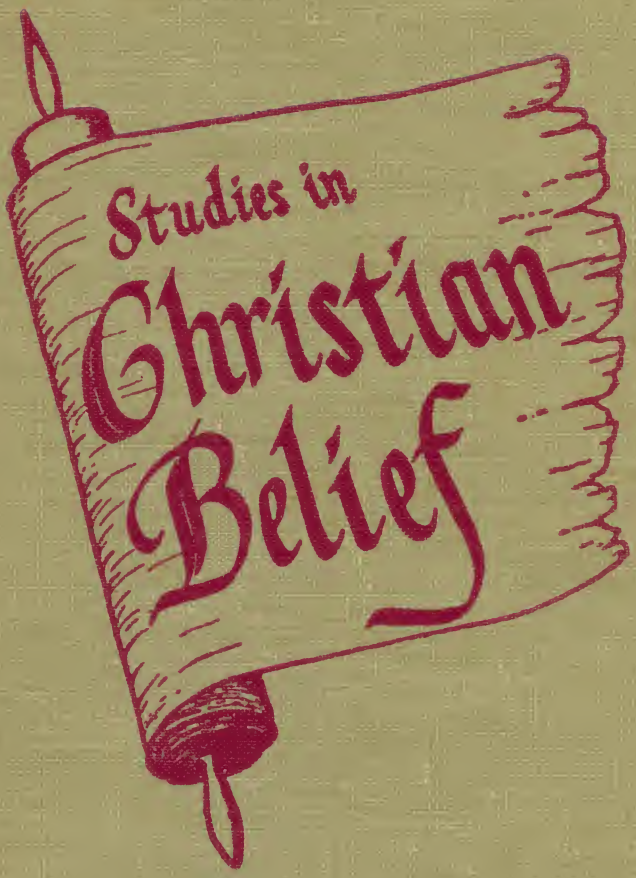
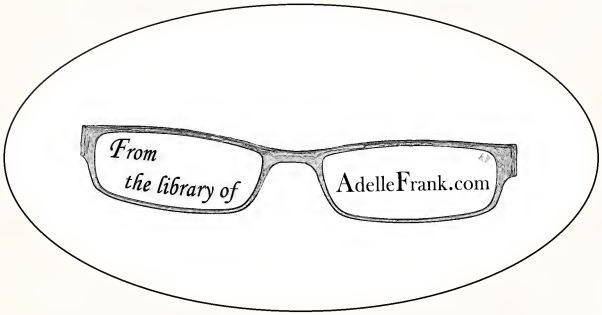


by William M. Beahm

Studies in Christian Belief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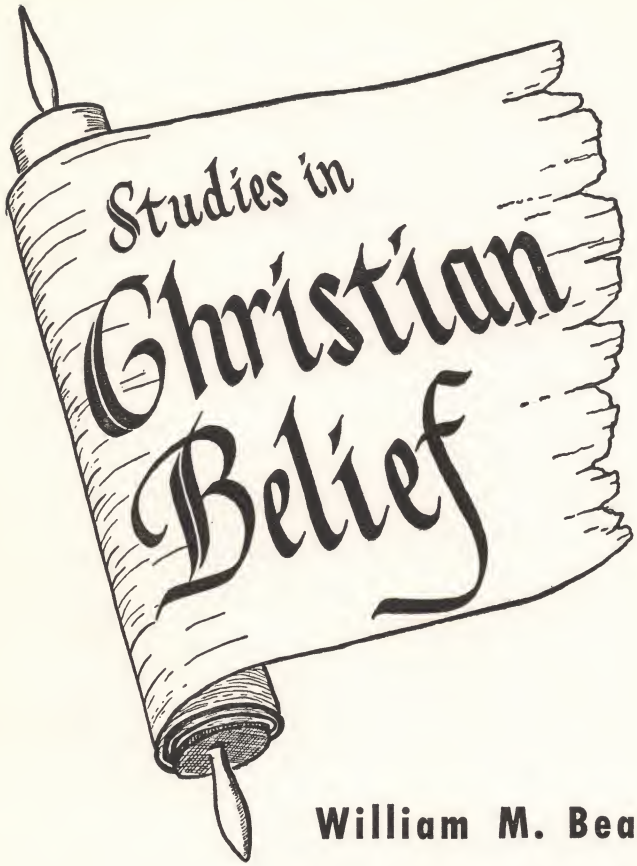

William M. Beahm

Dean, Bethany Biblical Seminary
Chicago, Illinois

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Gratefully dedicated to my teachers, to my colleagues on the faculty of Bethany Biblical Seminary, and to the many students with whom I have been engaged through the years in fruitful theological conversation

Table of Contents

Introduction

TIMES OF STRESS HAVE ALWAYS DRIVEN MEN TO RE-EXAMINE the basic faith by which they live. It is not strange, therefore, that in these momentous times of uncertainty and change there has been a heartening revival of interest in Christian theology. Even those churches which have been reluctant to express their basic convictions in any forms that might become creedal, and have shunned theology as such lest its concerns become a substitute for "the good life," have come more and more to realize that a clear understanding of the basic elements of the Christian gospel is the foundation for acceptable discipleship in any age, and an informed and compelling faith becomes the springs for the stream of Christlike living in the individual or in the social order.

This book, therefore, comes to fill a real need in the life of the church. It is written by one who by training and experience is qualified to set forth the basic elements of Christian belief. He has proved himself to be a trusted Christian statesman at home and abroad. His leadership has not only earned for him a unique place in the life of his own denomination, but has made him also an authoritative voice in the wider Christian fellowship. For more than two decades as Professor of Christian Doctrine at Bethany Biblical Seminary he has blessed the lives and influenced the minds of succeeding generations of theological students, patiently opening to them new doors of understanding of the faith to which they witness around the world.

Writing from his own Pietistic background, the author has nevertheless interpreted Christian doctrine with

the clear understanding of the best theological thought from the time of the early church until the present day. With his remarkable gift for expression, and his unfailing sense of humor, he has been able to present profound ideas in simple and understandable language. He has avoided the peril of speaking in unintelligible "theological tongues." Written out of his own deep religious faith, and a lifetime of Christian experience, the book becomes more than a study in doctrine. It is also a testament of devotion.

Here, then, is a book for all. Laymen will welcome it as a clear and forthright statement of the Christian faith. Pastors and teachers will find it invaluable as a study guide for classes. Young people will profit from its use in discussion groups. It will serve as a manual for studies in the meaning of church membership and Christian experience. But what is most important, it will give to all who read it a clearer understanding of "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints," and a deeper appreciation for the high calling which is the Christian Way.

—*Paul Minnich Robinson*

Bethany Biblical Seminary
Chicago, Illinois
August 1957

Preface

THESE STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN BELIEF WERE PREPARED AS ONE of several two-hundred-fiftieth anniversary volumes of the Church of the Brethren. This is a church which began in Schwarzenau, Germany, in 1708. This group of people had a Pietistic background and also came into close touch with the Anabaptist movement. They had all migrated to Pennsylvania by 1733; from there they spread gradually into Maryland and Virginia. In later years they followed the migrations into the central states and on to the Pacific coast. They were widely known as Dunkers but used the official name, German Baptist Brethren, until 1908 when the present name, Church of the Brethren, was adopted.

This has always been a noncreedal church and it has regarded the New Testament as the only and sufficient rule of faith and practice. Its early view on creeds was reflected in Michael Wohlfahrt's statement to Benjamin Franklin, as reported in the latter's *Autobiography*. Wohlfahrt, a member of a related but divergent group in Pennsylvania, explained why the early Dunkers had not formulated a creed. "When we were first drawn together as a society it had pleased God to enlighten our minds so far as to see that some doctrines, which we once esteemed truths, were errors; and that others, which we had esteemed errors, were real truths. From time to time He has been pleased to afford us further light, and our principles have been improving, and our errors diminishing. Now we are not sure that we are arrived at the end of this progression, and at the perfection of spiritual or theological knowledge; and we fear that, if

we should once print our confession of faith, we should feel ourselves as if bound and confined by it and perhaps be unwilling to receive further improvement, and our successors still more so, as conceiving what we their elders and founders had done, to be something sacred, never to be departed from."

This view on formal creeds did not imply disregard of Christian beliefs. The church has always had a deep interest in Bible doctrines. In preaching, teaching, debating, and publishing activities, her concern for true beliefs has been noteworthy. Like many other groups, she worked within the framework of evangelical Protestant beliefs and gave much attention to her own peculiar emphases. As late as 1908 H. C. Early, a leading spokesman, said: "The Protestant churches, for the most part, agree on the large and fundamental doctrines of the New Testament. . . . The Church of the Brethren would be understood as believing and teaching them with all her heart." While leaning on this framework of general Protestant belief, he proceeded to expound "the distinctive doctrines of the Church of the Brethren."[1]

I was nurtured in this framework but I have lived in a generation in which the unity of Protestant beliefs cannot so easily be taken for granted. The recent ferment and vigor of theological thought in the wider Christian world is a challenge and stimulus for all Christian groups to clarify and reappraise their total framework of belief. These chapters are an attempted encounter with the wider and older fundamentals of Christian belief. I hope that in this encounter the great common affirmations of Christian belief will be seen clearly and persuasively as a faith for today and tomorrow as well as for yesterday. I hope

[1] D. L. Miller *et al., Two Centuries of the Church of the Brethren: Bicentennial Addresses* (Elgin: Brethren Publishing House, 1908), pages 133-135.

further that the characteristic concerns of a Pietistic church will be seen as rooted in these common affirmations. Actually these studies do not represent the official viewpoint of any church body. They are my own formulation. These chapters are more than personal opinion, however, insofar as they seek to set forth the Christian faith which has its source, not in private preferences of belief, but in the Word made flesh.

The use of the apostolic benediction as the structural arrangement for this book was suggested by Dr. Alfred Garvie's volume, *The Christian Doctrine of the Godhead.* The selection of topics and their development make no attempt to follow those of Dr. Garvie. In the preparation of these chapters I have become increasingly persuaded that Christian belief is truth to witness to and to live by, not mere opinion which has to be propped up by vigorous contention.

Special thanks are due to the friends who have helped in a personal way to prepare and edit the manuscript and to my wife, Esther Eisenbise Beahm, without whose unfailing encouragement it would not have been written. The deficiencies which remain, after helpful counsel, are my own.

—*William M. Beahm*

Bethany Biblical Seminary
Chicago, Illinois
August 1957

CHAPTER ONE

The Nature and Credentials of Belief

In Mark 9:24 the father of an afflicted boy cried out to Jesus, "I believe; help my unbelief." He spoke not only for his own faithless generation but also for ours. We waver between belief and unbelief, unwilling to give up the former and unable to give up the latter.

We cherish the belief expressed in sentimental songs, "I believe." We lean toward "the sunny side of doubt." We cling tenaciously to "the will to believe." We long for the truth of things. And yet we are often beset by the chill of unbelief. This unbelief may be due to the justifiable rebellion against the arrogant and pretentious certainties of so-called religious people. It may be due to bewilderment in periods of rapid change. It may be due to the confusion or betrayal of authorities we have trusted. It may be due to disappointment of our hopes or to the sorrow of suffering or the grief of bereavement. It finds greatest warrant also in the superstitions from which we have been freed and in new truth we have discovered. Once we have caught ourselves being credulous and gullible, we tend to take matters of belief with a grain of salt. We try to comfort ourselves by saying, "It is not what one believes that matters; it is what one does."

And yet what blessing there is in belief! What comfort there is in the assurance that what we trust in is solid and dependable! What meaning there is to life when we see that it is going somewhere! What joy there

is to know that we are not alone in the world, that there are those and there is One who care for us! And so we cry out, "I believe; help my unbelief."

True belief cannot be whipped up by closing the eyes and taking a deep breath. It must have some basis in reality. If we suspect that it is only wishful thinking, the starch goes out of it. This is not always clear to us immediately, but sometimes our vigor of insistence is itself a betrayal of our doubt. "Methinks thou doth protest too much!"

There are different levels or qualities of belief. There is belief as recognition of a fact or of the truth of a statement. Sometimes this is as easy as to acknowledge that this is Tuesday or that the sun is shining. Sometimes is is difficult and we cannot believe our eyes. We are like the zoo visitor who saw his first giraffe and declared unbelievingly, "There is no such animal!" This kind of belief can be very jaunty. One can believe with "profound disengagement" that Mt. Everest is 29,141 feet above sea level. Or it can be significant.

A strong sense of the reality and nature of things comes only from believing that they are what they are. Respect for "stubborn and irreducible facts" is the gateway to truth. Such realism is the road to reality. "For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists" and he must also believe "that he rewards those who seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). This kind of belief involves an "engagedness of the heart." It is an earnest conviction and a deep personal trust. It is the commitment of one's life to the truth which is believed.

This level of belief is exemplified in the story of the Frenchman who stretched a cable across the gorge of the Niagara River. His fame went far when he pushed

a wheelbarrow, with a man riding in it, across the gorge. An enthusiast who came a long distance to see this marvel was asked by the Frenchman if he believed it could be done. The new arrival declared his belief that it could. Whereupon the Frenchman replied, "That is fortunate, because the man who usually rides in the wheelbarrow is ill and I want you to take his place today." That requires fullness of belief—such a certainty of the truth that one is prepared to stake one's life on it.

It is an error to say that beliefs do not matter. To be sure, our statements of belief may not accurately represent the deep convictions which we hold. But it makes a big difference what our deep convictions are. They furnish the slant and climate of our lives. They determine our inner loyalties and, both in the pinch and in the long run, the pattern of our behavior. Mistaken beliefs issue in mistaken deeds. Good beliefs when deeply held issue in good deeds, for "from it [the heart] flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

The Christian believer does not use any organs of belief different from those which other people use for other beliefs. His beliefs are a response to an encounter with God as embodied in Jesus Christ. It is not our Christian beliefs which sent him walking the shores of Galilee or the hills of Judea. It is the intrusive and compelling fact of Jesus Christ which has given rise to these Christian beliefs. By what credentials then does the present-day Christian espouse these beliefs? There are three, viz.—the Bible, the church, and experience.

The Bible

The Bible is a book and more than a book. It is a library of documents which took many centuries to

write but which were compiled into a whole early in the Christian era. This book has had an amazing circulation and influence all over the world. It is such a widely sold book that best-seller lists do not bother to include it. The American Bible Society in the first hundred years of its life printed nearly twenty-five million complete Bibles and over a hundred million Testaments and portions, while the British and Foreign Bible Society issued twice as many in a similar period. The Bible as a whole or in portions has been put into about eleven hundred languages and dialects. It has been translated into ten times as many languages as has any other book. How then shall we regard a book with such an amazing history?

Not a Magical Book

One way is to regard it as a magical book. There is a world-wide tendency to treat sacred books this way. A Moslem teacher in Nigeria spends much time writing out verses from the Koran and sewing them up in a leather amulet to be worn as a charm around the neck or wrist. Sometimes he will write them on a wooden tablet and then wash them off with water which is to be drunk for special blessing to the drinker. We get close to this view when we encourage soldiers to wear a New Testament in the left shirt pocket to ward off bullets from the heart. A bit of skepticism shows up in a special edition which was published with steel covers on the outside. This magical mood shows up when we use the Bible to decorate the living-room table or to swear by, as if its physical presence is automatically effective for weal or woe. In the nature of the case, the Bible is an intelligible book addressed to man's mind and an ethical book addressed to his will. It is misused indeed when we thus disregard the message it contains and regard it as a book of magic.

Not Primarily a Literary Work

Or the Bible may be regarded as high-quality literature. It is that, indeed, especially in the "purple patches" of the Psalms and the Prophets of the Old Testament and in the words of Jesus and the lyric spots of the Epistles in the New Testament. It is no marvel that our enduring literary authors find in the Bible models of excellence and inspiration. But the Bible is never satisfied to be mere literature. Beauty and polish, balanced periods, and self-conscious style are not its primary mode. It is too much in earnest to be regarded merely as literature.

Not Primarily a Scientific Description

Or again the Bible may be regarded as a scientific document describing the nature of the physical world. While there is much reference in it to this world of seas and rivers, hills and valleys, deserts and rainbows, flora and fauna, its primary concern lies elsewhere—in the God of heaven and earth. While it was written by men who may have regarded the earth as flat and at the center of the solar system, its message or its view of God is not invalidated by later discovery that the earth is round and that it revolves around the sun. The interstellar spaces may be millions of light years greater than the psalmist surmised. But it is clearer than ever that "the heavens are telling the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1). As an adequate philosophy of the origin and administration of nature, however, the Bible is a profound and illuminating book. Its doctrine of creation saves the mind from the maddening maze of "infinite regress." Its doctrine of providence, which regards God as a reality above nature and yet in control of nature, answers the problems of both regular order and of unpredictable novelty.

Not Primarily a Book of History

Still others regard the Bible primarily as a book of history. Here perhaps current views and the Bible are closest together. To be sure, the Bible is Oriental history speaking often in parables and poetry rather than in the bleak prose of so-called scientific reports of events. Some parts of the narrative may seem hard to relate to archeological findings. But the Bible is set for the most part within the stirring events of history. Sennacherib, King Uzziah, Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, and other solid historical characters dot its pages. Its events are set in designatable places rather than in Never Never Land. The Bible regards God as acting in history and as Lord of all the earth. Indeed, it is this sense of divine purpose that gives meaning to history as history. This has been called the linear view of history as contrasted with the cyclic view of recurrence which marks Oriental and classic thought about the world. This line is based more on faith in God's purposes than on the shaky evidence that history is going somewhere on its own. This faith undergirds most of Western thought and gives it what hope it has. It is so deeply ingrained in our thought that it is often taken for granted and regarded as a natural assumption.

The Bible Is the Word of God

It is truest to the Bible's own view of itself to regard it as the Word of God. As such it must be seen both in its fixed and abiding character and in its flexible and living character. In a sense it is the most fixed and static item in our Christian tradition. The security of our faith demands permanence and continuity in the object of our faith. We believe confidently in that in which "there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17).

The Bible Is Unchanging

It is fixed in the tremendous events which it records. These are regarded as the mighty acts of God. In the Old Testament the fixed point is the deliverance from Egypt. This is elaborated in song and story, in ritual and in worship. In the New Testament the fixed point is the "event of Christ." The Word of God "became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The birth and childhood of Jesus, his public ministry and teaching, the gathering of his disciples into an intimate fellowship, his prophetic witness to the nation, and, at last, his crucifixion and burial, his resurrection and the experience of Pentecost—these are not a set of mere ideas or maxims. They are events which occurred and of which the Bible bears witness. Much thought is given to the interpretation of these events. This will go on constantly as long as men live to think about them, but the event is fixed in the ineradicable finality of having happened.

Moreover, the Bible is fixed in its central message. The "event of Christ" is regarded by Christian faith as the definitive Word of God. "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Hebrews 1:1, 2a). This Word is the clue to history. It gives the interpretation of all that went before and it throws light on all that follows after. The division of our calendar between B.C. and A.D. is a vivid witness to the Christian interpretation of history, not primarily from its beginning or even from its end, but from the mid-point where we have been given "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

It will take all of time, and of eternity too, to comprehend the riches of the incarnation. But it is the Christian's faith that here is where, once for all, we hear

God's ultimate Word. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). This is the basis for regarding the Scriptural canon as closed—not as a restriction of truth, but as an assured conviction that here we have it matchlessly set forth. It is somewhat like the marvelous outcropping of red and buff sandstone in Colorado's Garden of the Gods. As one travels southward or northward he sees recurrent evidences of a continuous wall of such material all along the Rocky Mountains. But at one mid-point they can be seen in their definitive beauty and all the rest of it is to be seen in the light of that disclosure. This is "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

The Bible Is a Living Book

But the Bible has also a flexible and active quality to it. Its permanence is not of a static or stony type.

The Bible is alive in its power to quicken the men who ponder its pages. The Bible is alive and flexible in its use of language. Its authority does not inhere in mechanical or rigid forms of thought or language. Much of it is written in metaphor and in picturesque phrases. It is full of symbols and poetry. These modes of language are able to convey religious and spiritual truth more effectively than if it were written in flat prose. The Bible requires imagination and discernment to be read with understanding.

Such a view of its flexibility frees a person from the bondage of a wooden literalism. It enables him, for example, to see the one main point of a parable, without making it "walk on all fours" by seeking special significance in every bit of its colorful details. It enables him to interpret the variation of wording which different Gospel writers give to their reports or interpretations of

given events. It enables a person to use the Bible in different versions and languages without confusion but rather as a means of seeing the full wealth of meaning in it. It enables him to hold a vital conception of divine inspiration. The Bible should not be regarded as a document dictated to an empty-minded stenographer, but rather as the highly creative writing of a dedicated person at the fullness of his mental and spiritual powers. Such a person "outdoes" himself in what he sees and what he writes under the living influence of the Holy Spirit.

In a sense this is the strange power of all good books. John Milton reminds us in his *Areopagitica* that "books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are." How much truer this is of the Bible is indicated by these words from Coleridge: "In the Bible there is more that finds me than I have experienced in all other books put together; the words of the Bible find me at greater depth of my being; and whatever finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of its having proceeded from the Holy Spirit."

The Bible is alive in its ability to inaugurate new religious movements of great power. Saint Francis heard the words of the weekly lesson at the lectern of the Assisi church and his revolutionized life inaugurated an order whose vitality and blessing are beyond calculation. Martin Luther pored over the Psalms and Romans and was so quickened that he could defy pope and emperor with the bold declaration, "Here I stand." His translation of the Bible into German did much to set the Reformation going. Repeatedly, in history, the fresh study of the Bible has thus poured new life into the church and into the common life.

In the nature of the case the process of translation

and revision must go on repeatedly to make the unchanging message of the Bible clear in the living language of the people. Bible scholars are ever active, pushing in two directions at once. They push back through the centuries to discover the earliest possible manuscripts on which the Scriptures were written.[1] The nearer they can get to original eyewitness records the more secure is their hold on the original events which are the foundation of our faith. They also push forward to the living language of everyday speech. Only so can this message come into the daily life of the people, for if you "utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air" (1 Corinthians 14:9). In such translation and revision it is important to go beyond a mechanical exchange of a word in one language for an equivalent word in another language. Scholars must understand the peculiar idioms of each language and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit seek to convey in the new language the full and rich meaning of what has been said in the old one.

The Bible is thus the living Word of God. It gives us dependable credentials for our Christian faith. It gives us a solid basis for our belief. It is "inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Church

But the Bible does not provide the only credentials of our Christian faith. There is also the church. We refer to the church in its broadest sense, leaving until

[1] It is interesting to note that the New Testament manuscripts available for the Revised Standard Version take us back eight hundred years nearer to the time of our Lord than did those which were available in 1611 when the King James Version was issued.

later a fuller consideration of the doctrine of the church. But if we think of the church at all, it is an inescapable fact. It is an ongoing and living community which reaches from the time of Jesus down to our day. It is a community which has reached from the country of Jesus over to our own and around the world.

In a real sense the church is the community in which the Bible originated. This is especially true of the New Testament. The Epistles and Revelation were missionary letters to young churches scattered around the Mediterranean. They shared these documents, which supplemented the gospel which was preached by traveling apostles, teachers, and evangelists. Other writings and sayings about the life and ministry of Jesus were cherished among them and grew into the Gospels as we know them. Mark is usually regarded as the earliest Gospel. Matthew presumably drew from Mark and added other trustworthy material from the sayings and teachings of Jesus. Luke, statedly, used similar materials "just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" (1:2). John, probably written later than the other three Gospels, gives us a rich interpretation of the meaning of Jesus' earthly advent as it was taking deep rootage in the life and reflection of the church. In the Acts of the Apostles we see vividly described this growing and vital church fellowship. Here the Holy Spirit is active in the midst of the early Christians as they bear witness to what Christ meant to them. Here we see the vigorous and discerning community within which the Epistles and the Gospels were written and read.

The church has gathered these writings together into the Bible, which the church translates, revises, and publishes. It is an amazing and creative combination—a

people of the book of God and a book of the people of God. The original revelation in Jesus Christ was interpreted in the book. The book finds continuous interpretation in the ongoing fellowship of the church.

In this framework we can look with more appreciation at a few familiar but sometimes vexing terms which are still important in matters of belief.

Some Misunderstood Terms

Orthodoxy is a word often regarded as a strait jacket on thought, requiring unthinking conformity to static formulations of belief. But it should be taken to refer to the general consensus of Christian believers about their faith. It refers to the enduring and meaningful understanding which the church has had of the Bible and its message.

Dogma, a word related to *dogmatic,* is often taken to mean an arbitrary and arrogant statement of required belief. But the dogmas of the Christian faith represent the consensus of belief which its followers regard as important and as meaningful. Authority in matters of belief can become external and can express itself in political pressure, indeed. But the authority of Christian belief lies in the weight and worth of the church's witness to the truth in Christ. Creeds are misused when they require external or unthinking conformity to a set of propositions. They are misused when they are substituted for the Bible itself as the final and complete norm of Christian belief.

Noncreedal churches are concerned about the dangers of such misuse, and therefore they oppose the adoption of official and authoritative creeds. They try to keep an open Bible partly because they think it is sufficiently clear on the main points of salvation and partly because they

expect new light to break forth from its pages repeatedly.

Creedal statements can be useful, however, if they are regarded as a brief and memorable form of Christian belief as it faces spurious substitutes which from time to time might threaten to replace Biblical faith. It is valuable to have, in every age, short and simple statements of Biblical faith which may help to clarify and unify the church's consensus on vital issues.

Theology itself is a term often misunderstood. Sometimes it is made to mean too much and sometimes it is made to mean too little. It is a serious effort to discover, expound, and defend the central truths involved in the experience of the church. It is related as a discipline or a science to other areas of thought and inquiry but its primary norms and concerns center in the church and in her ongoing life. In every age the meaning of the Christian faith must be re-examined so as to bring it to bear upon the changing thought and experience of men. Such work is worthy of the same careful and devoted scholarship and discipline that are given to other areas of knowledge. Only so can we love God with all our minds.

Christian Experience

A third element in the credentials of Christian belief is experience. It is, of course, not presumed that Christian truth comes into being when it is a matter of experience. The above emphasis on the events of the Bible should make this clear. But within the Bible itself there is frequent appeal to the validation of experience. "O taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). "If any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God" (John 7:17). The truths of the Christian faith wait, for their effectiveness, upon the response of

men. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). The pathway into the kingdom of God is open to those who tread it. Even the gift of God requires to be stirred up and rekindled (2 Timothy 1:6). The sovereign power and the outflowing love of God await the response of the believer. "Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). Those who see the special significance of believer's baptism are impressed by this fact. And even those who practice infant baptism require godparents as sponsors and they require confirmation at the time the infant later reaches the age of accountability.

In our consideration of experience, we should keep several items clear.

Individual and Social Experience

One is that individual and social experience need to be checked against each other. The experience of the group, the community, or the race is further validated, corrected, and enriched by the experience of each individual. This is especially true of creative artists, pioneers, and prophets. Fifty million Frenchmen might be wrong. "Where there is no prophecy the people cast off restraint" (Proverbs 29:18). By the same token the novel and creative experiences of such individuals are checked and confirmed by the experience of the group and the community. The deviating nonconformist or rebel might be only one more misguided "crackpot" or stubborn paranoiac. Happily this two-way aspect of experience goes on all the time. For everyone born into the world is both a private individual and a participator in group experience.

What applies to the relationship between the individual and his group applies also between the experience of one group and another. The Christian experience of one area further validates, corrects, and enriches that of another area. Likewise one era for another era. Thus historical continuity and world-wide unity are the full framework of Christian experience.

The Whole Man Believes

Another item to note about experience is that beliefs are an exercise of our total personalities. There is no organ of belief. One can say the same about knowledge in general and religious knowledge in particular. Perception and reason, conscience and mind, faith and the soul of man—or however we divide ourselves up for analysis—are so many aspects of the experiencing person. Reason and the critical mind have their place, for faith is not a capacity to believe a number of incredible things. We are to test everything and hold fast what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Faith and the trusting spirit have their place also. Even the common knowledge of daily life as well as the accumulated wealth of scientific understanding is set within the framework of assumptions about life and the world of nature which lie beyond proof. In the realm of religious truth this is even more the case. There is always an aura of mystery beyond our precise certainties. The Christian's beliefs, therefore, retain even in experience a quality of hiddenness and indemonstrability where the exercise of faith is required.

Our Experience Is of Things

The third item is that religious experience, like all other experience, is an experience of things. Religion is not merely a quality or flavor of one's own inner moods.

Religious experience, like all other experience, is a relationship to an objective world of reality. This world is "out there" and is what it is. It is other than our experience of it. Christianity is not a religion the truth of which is made up of psychic states. The burrs of the mind need grain to work on in order to produce flour. It is the precise authority of religious experience that it points beyond itself. This is another way of saying that our religious experience is an experience of God. What we believe is regarded as the Word of God. Whatever ideas or truths we hold as Christians have their basis in him. Indeed, the idea of revelation centers primarily in God's own ability to disclose himself to us. Ours is a God who speaks. His word is never mere propositional truth but the address of the Living One in whose presence we stand.

All Is of the Holy Spirit

This mode of thought is what is meant by the Christian experience of the Holy Spirit. In these terms we can correlate the three elements in the credentials of Christian belief. The Bible is a record of what the Holy Spirit spoke to men and moved men to write. To be sure, they wrote in their own language and in their own style and idiom. Their inspiration flowed through the full equipment of their minds and souls. But the writers frequently indicate that the Word of God came unto them. Sometimes it came in open and eager meditation. Again it came as a kind of "otherness" with which they wrestled and to which they responded with reluctance.

Our belief in the inspired authority of the Bible includes also a belief that the Holy Spirit presided over the Christian community as it preserved these documents and as it gathered them together in an approved canon. He presides over and inspires editors and committees who

make new translations and revisions of the Bible from time to time. He presides over and inspires the preachers and teachers who interpret the Bible. He is present always when we open the Bible for study and meditation, illuminating the mind to understand and quickening the soul to believe what the Word of God is. It is a never-ending marvel indeed how the arrangement of letters on a page serves across the years and around the world as a medium whereby God's own living Word is given to his people.

Our beliefs, then, are the expression of a deep-seated capacity and hunger within us. Curiosity about the nature of things, longing for the true, the beautiful, and the good, the impulsion to do that which we see is right, the desire for adventure and achievement—all these are strands in the golden cord of belief. They are reflections of the image of God in man. Men are so made "that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him" (Acts 17:27).

But our belief is not something we produce on our own. It represents the response we make to God as he has revealed himself to us. This disclosure comes to us through the glory of the heavens (Psalm 19:1) and through rains from heaven and fruitful seasons (Acts 14:17). It comes through the prophets and the saints whom God raises up among men to bless them. Christian belief is our response to God's final and sufficient Word which he has spoken to us by a Son (John 1:14; Hebrews 1:1).

Belief is indeed a blessing. It is a source of peace of mind and a sustaining necessity of life. Christian belief, centering in the advent of Jesus Christ into the world, is a special and inexhaustible blessing. Having seen him we have seen the Father (John 14:9). God was in him "reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

The message of the gospel may thus be simply stated,

and it comforts our hearts. To elaborate the full range of Christian belief many men have written large volumes of theological works. The purpose of the present work is to set forth in a small handbook an outline of Christian belief. It is an attempt to do this in terms of the familiar benediction: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:14).

The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Of all the benedictions in the Bible or in the usage of the Christian community the one used by Paul at the end of Second Corinthians is perhaps the most familiar and definitive. It is sometimes called the apostolic benediction, though it was written here by one not of the original Twelve. Like all such short and memorable farewells, it could have had a wide currency at the time. Or it may have been formulated by Paul himself and have come into formal usage afterwards. In any case it is true to the central beliefs and worship of the early church.

It does not need to imply that there was at that time a fully articulated doctrine of the Trinity. But in this benediction, as in the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19, we have the elements of early Christian belief and worship which foreshadowed the later theological discussion and definition.

The order is significant, and it is different from the logic of most systematic theology. For Paul and the early Christians the starting point of belief was at the center of their experience—Jesus Christ. He was the specific and definitive expression of God's character and purposes. "He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature" (Hebrews 1:3). His significance, moreover, is summed up in the word "grace." This is a word with two major meanings. One is charm and winsomeness, the ability to give delight and pleasure, as reflected in the word "gracious." The other is unmerited favor, as in

"days of grace" or "salvation by grace." For the early Christians close to Jesus, he had both of these meanings. He was "the lily of the valley, the bright and morning star, . . . the fairest of ten thousand to the soul." He was also the expression of God's unmerited favor. It was through this amazing grace that they came to know the Father's love and that they were bound together in a new community, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER TWO

The Man Christ Jesus

CHRISTIANITY IS PRIMARILY A RELIGION OF A PERSON. IT HAS a book of sacred scripture. It has many doctrines and precepts. It has organization and ritual. But beyond all of these is its center of interest and devotion—"the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Its view of God centers in him. Its view of man's true nature derives from him. The life of the church flows from him. Its hope for the world lies in him, as does its assurance in the world to come.

One can open the New Testament almost anywhere and his towering figure fills the whole horizon. "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14). "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10, 11). "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession" (Hebrews 4:14). "My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory" (James 2:1). "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and

Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Revelation 1:5b, 6).

Thus the Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation all have one overwhelming and illuminating center. In none of the world's other religions is the founder so vivid and matchless in character or so central and dominant in influence as is Jesus for Christianity. Moses is noted for the Law which he gave to his people. Buddha comforted his disciples by reminding them that after he was gone they would still have his teachings. Mohammed was only a special prophet of Allah. Indeed, today his followers insist that the correct name for their religion is not Mohammedanism but Islam, the religion of submission. Jesus was and is different, for he said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). "And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

To understand the Christian faith, therefore, it is important to clarify our beliefs about Jesus Christ. What we believe centers about the doctrine of his person and the doctrine of his work; who he was and is, and what he did and does. The doctrine of Christ's person is based on two convictions about him: that he was a man and that he was more than a man. These two convictions raise many problems for Christian thought and much controversy has marked the history of this thought. But the convictions are based on the impact Jesus Christ made and makes on his followers. Let us look at the reasons for the convictions. How we relate them to each other in our thought is a subsidiary matter. Let us look first at the humanity of Jesus.

Jesus Was Truly Human

The whole doctrine of the incarnation is based on the real humanity of Jesus. As John puts it, "the Word

became flesh" (John 1:14). This word *flesh* is one often contrasted with *spirit* and is thus concrete and explicit. It is a repudiation of all Gnostic discounting of man's physical nature. Paul confirms the humanity in these terms: "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law" (Galatians 4:4). "Being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form" (Philippians 2:7b-8a). "Sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3). "The man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

The birth stories in Matthew and Luke are fully as concerned to affirm his real humanity as his supernatural qualities. The event is set within definite historical limits. Caesar Augustus was emperor in Rome. Quirinius was governor in Syria. Herod was king in Jerusalem. The birth was in Judea, while the parents were on a journey from Nazareth, where they lived, to Bethlehem, where they were being enrolled. Heavenly as all this story is, its purpose is to show when and where this Jesus came "out of the everywhere into the here."

The New Testament emphasized this humanity not as a concession to or as an incidental aspect of Christ's nature but as an essential part of it. Indeed, the earliest heresy about his personal nature was a denial of his real humanity. This erroneous Gnostic view is reflected in the New Testament's vigorous denial. "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist" (2 John 7).

A Human Body

This idea of humanity means that Jesus Christ was a man physically. The above references are clear on this. They are supported by others. He grew in stature from

childhood to manhood (Luke 2:40, 52). When fully grown he underwent the usual bodily experiences of fatigue (John 4:6) and sleep (Mark 4:38; Luke 8:23). He became hungry after a long fast (Luke 4:2) and on other occasions as well (Mark 11:12). He became thirsty, and used this as a point of contact for deeper sharing (John 4:6, 7). One mark of the hot anguish on the cross was the cry, "I thirst" (John 19:28). So given was he to the normal fellowship of eating and drinking that his enemies called him a glutton and a drunkard (Luke 7:34). His physical humanity is inherent in his suffering and death. All four Gospels give extended space to his agony and death and the record is given in great detail. Whenever men have minimized his real physical humanity, with however exalted motives, they have deviated from the earthly actuality of "the days of his flesh" (Hebrews 5:7). No recovery of emphasis upon his humanity in the last hundred years goes beyond the testimony of the New Testament. Men may write imaginary biographies of the Man from Nazareth which carry an air of vivid truth. But their authenticity lies in the solid gospel records.

A Human Mind

He was also human psychologically. He grew in wisdom as he did in stature (Luke 2:52). He asked questions, evidently expecting answers for information (Luke 2:46). On one occasion he said he did not know the day or the hour of future events (Mark 13:32). He experienced human emotions. He knew sorrow. When John the Baptist was killed "he withdrew from there in a boat to a lonely place apart" (Matthew 14:13; see also Mark 6:31). When his friend Lazarus died he wept (John 11:35). He knew joy also (Luke 10:21) and even anger (Mark 3:5).

A Human Spirit

He was human in the moral and spiritual sense. Some very devout people find difficulty here, but the record is clear and explicit. Three of the Gospels report his temptation in the wilderness following his baptism (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1-13). While these temptations were set in terms of an extraordinary divine calling, they were all appeals to a human personality and were directed to elemental desires for food, for a short cut to success, and for power. After this temptation the devil "departed from him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13).

Evidently these temptations, connected as they were with his messianic mission, were recurrent. Thus he rebuked Peter's well-meant aversion to his suffering in the startling words, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mark 8:33). The climax of this moral struggle was in Gethsemane. "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:44). The Epistle to the Hebrews puts this moral development in bold terms, indeed. "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered" (5:7, 8). "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (4:15).

The Gracious Character of Jesus

A generation ago it was the fashion to write "Lives" of Jesus depicting in vivid terms the personal traits of this

man from Nazareth. This "Jesus of History" was sometimes analyzed and portrayed with little reference to the high Christology of the New Testament. Attempts were made to get back behind the "Christ of Faith" as set forth in the Epistles and in John's Gospel to the simple man of Galilee. One tendency of these studies was a glib identification of Jesus and his teachings with whatever social movement the author was espousing. Accordingly Jesus was seen now as a labor leader and now as a highly successful business executive with a genius for advertising and salesmanship.

It is important to learn, then, the peril of modernizing Jesus. The quest of the historical Jesus is based upon a very limited amount of material. The record of his personality and character is limited to the New Testament. The Gospels report only one eleventh of his life span. It is estimated that they mention what he did or said on only from thirty to thirty-five days. This would be only one three-hundredth part of his thirty-three years of earthly career. We have no photograph of him and no tape-recording of his voice. It is not possible to fill out with any fullness the vivid details of his appearance and manner or to have a complete account of his personal character.

However, it is not our loss that in the providence of God we lack these details concerning Christ after the flesh, for it is possible to see in the New Testament a portrait of the man Christ Jesus. This portrait, being a combination of events and interpretation, enables us to see the character of Jesus in depth. It is three-dimensional in perspective rather than a two-dimensional "candid camera" picture. The racy narrative of Mark combines with the added materials of Matthew and Luke and the spiritual understanding of John to give us a vivid and inescapable impression of Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is important to remember that the personal qualities and character traits of this particular man in history so impressed his followers that they left all else to be in his company and gave to him the lordship over their lives. The word they used to indicate the impression he made was *grace*. His gracious and winning life was the light of men. Many are the ways he showed it but there is space and need for only a few examples.

His Sympathy and Compassion

His grace and charm were shown, for example, by his sympathy and compassion. His works of healing were not primarily signs. They were not advertising techniques to secure a following. Indeed, he sought to avoid the kind of publicity such spectacular deeds would arouse. He knew that an evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign and hence he declared, "No sign shall be given" (Mark 8:12). And yet he went on healing all manner of diseases and feeding the multitude. The motive is clearly stated—he was moved with compassion. Even on the last tragic trip to Jerusalem he had time to stop his entourage and heal a blind man at Jericho (Luke 18:42). This mood of compassion has ever since been graciously recalled in the phrase, "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by" (Luke 18:37, King James Version).

His Meekness and Humility

His grace and charm were shown in his meekness and humility. He said of himself, "I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). He pronounced one of his beatitudes upon the meek (Matthew 5:5). His triumphal entry into Jerusalem was an enacted parable of the kind of king he was willing to be—not with the might of armies or the power of the sceptre but "humble and mounted on

an ass" (Matthew 21:5). He would not be the kind of benefactor who would lord it over his subjects but one who was in their midst as a servant (Mark 10:42-45). His disarming humility overwhelmed his disciples as he washed their feet. Their pride and contentiousness were broken and they were drawn to him and to each other forever (John 13:1-35).

This meekness and humility were shown in his poverty. In his earthly life he had nowhere to lay his head (Luke 9:58). Had he been rich there might have been a subtle wall between him and his friends, for wealth is often like a moat around a castle across which no bridge can reach. He came into the world with no pomp or pretense and in this humble status lay his appeal. Paul was impressed by this fact. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

His Friendships

His grace and charm were shown in his friendships. He had genuine love for all sorts and conditions of people. Rich and poor, men and women, high and low, respectable and outcasts—all had access to his friendship. His affection for children was particularly notable in one of such moral earnestness and with such a weighty mission. Mark gives us the familiar and charming picture of his taking a child in his arms (Mark 9:36). Mothers of children brought them to him, that he might touch them (Matthew 19:13). His characteristic delight in them was expressed in the injunction, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14).

His friendships spread clear across the spectrum from

ultraviolet "blue bloods" at one end to infrared "parlor pinks" at the other. Thus Nicodemus and Joseph were his friends within the Sanhedrin and among his disciples there was a fiery revolutionist named Simon the Zealot. He had the disarming simplicity and directness which enabled him to cut through conventionality and bridge social distance. His conversations were person-to-person engagements with now a centurion (Luke 7:2-10), now a leper (Mark 1:40-45), now a tax collector (Mark 2:13-17), and now a grief-stricken mother mourning her departed son (Luke 7:11-16).

These friendships often involved him in much risk of social disapproval, as in the cases of Levi (Mark 2:16), and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:7), the Gerasene demoniac (Luke 8:37), and the woman who anointed his feet in Simon's house (Luke 7:39). Indeed, he had a special interest in the underprivileged and distressed and he sought them out to befriend them. He explained his acts in these words: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17).

Perhaps the climax of his love and friendliness was in his attitude toward his enemies. Very early in his career they sought to discount and hinder his ministry, especially when he healed on the Sabbath. "And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart" (Mark 3:5). He had repeated occasions of such opposition from the Pharisees and rulers, and he sought to shock them with the woes which awaited them. But he still yearned over them and pronounced his judgments out of a broken heart (Luke 13:34, 35). At long last while on the cross he offered the incredible prayer for his enemies who were crucifying him, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

His Moral Earnestness

Another aspect of his charm and appeal was his moral earnestness and loyalty to God's righteous will. One must love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). One must seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Even loyalty to one's family is to be sternly subordinated to devotion to God's will. "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mark 3:35). The touchstone whereby he was guided in his temptations in the wilderness and in Gethsemane was the will of God. Jesus interpreted God's will in absolute terms. Moses made allowance for hardness of heart. But Jesus did not see it that way. For him the claim of God is for a man to be morally perfect.

Some persons attempt to soften these claims by regarding Jesus' statements as Oriental exaggerations or as picturesque metaphors which must be adapted to practical problems. But the way Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem and the unflinching integrity with which he endured his passion make clear how earnest he was in doing God's will. To be sure, there was a glad and joyous quality to his obedience. "He who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him" (John 8:29). Out of this ready and sustained personal loyalty to God's righteous will, Jesus calls upon his disciples then and now to deny themselves, take up their own crosses, and follow him (Mark 8:34).

This call to discipleship has ever been one of the challenging and winsome features of Jesus' influence on men. At times it is extremely frightening. "And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid" (Mark 10:32). Such utter loyalty to God's righteous will has ever had a haunting and

disturbing charm and grace. In this as in other qualities of his character it can be said that he was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Books have been filled with the varied qualities of his character. These are not to dissect his personality but to make vivid to ourselves the full and sincere power of "the man Christ Jesus." It is to expose ourselves to him as the early disciples did, to come near to him and look at him through their eyes.

Implications of the Humanity of Jesus Christ

So strong has been the tendency among devout Christians to stress the deity of Christ and obscure his humanity that it is well to look at the implications of the latter.

God Works in History

It confirms the fact that God works concretely in history. The Old Testament is replete with God's actions in nature. He is regarded as the Lord of heaven and earth. This belief is akin to what many other nature gods are presumed to do. But God is also regarded as in control of the rise and fall of nations. Their destiny is presided over by his inescapable power. However wayward they may become, the day of the Lord will come when his righteous will will be done. Thus, in the fullness of time this man "born of woman, born under the law" was sent by God as the agent of his will. The centuries of Israel's experience and the long years of Judah's hoping were fulfilled by him in the very texture of ongoing historical experience. This was not a universal principle or an abstract idea but a specific event in which God was working out his will. It was not merely God's act upon history but his working within it.

God Honors Personality

Another implication is that God honors human personality. By the Christian faith man is regarded as having his source in God. The pagan poets affirmed that "we are indeed his offspring" (Acts 17:28). Even in our own day the measurement of personality breaks down when the intelligent quotient goes beyond one hundred forty. Then we quit measuring and speak of genius. The word *genius* is a religious term which seeks to explain a person by ascribing his power to some spiritual being within him which takes possession of him and makes him what he is! These are intimations of the deep wealth of human personality. In the man Christ Jesus we see man at his best and as God intends him to be. The image of God in man from creation may be marred and distorted. But here we have in a human figure "the very stamp of his nature" (Hebrews 1:3). This is a man whose character was known by his followers. They had seen him with their eyes and their hands had handled him. Thus God, who reveals himself, in a measure, through nature and through the processes of history, gives his climaxing disclosure through a man.

Our Moral Example

Closely related to this is the clear implication that, since Jesus Christ is a man, he can serve as the moral example of his followers. To be sure, there were and are aspects of his person and his work which differ from, and are well beyond, the part of his followers. In profound ways he does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We shall have occasion to discuss these later. But no high Christology can lessen the claim of his example upon us.

His moral teachings, given in occasional parables and more formally in the Sermon on the Mount, are set

forth with explicit claims upon our obedience. "If any man has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mark 4:23). Those who hear and do not obey are like a foolish builder upon sand. Those who hear and do are like a wise builder upon rock (Matthew 7:24-27). In the washing of his disciples' feet his word is explicit: "For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). This applies not merely to a ritual act but to the whole pattern of mutual deference and service.

His exemplary character inheres also in the higher religious levels of his life. He is our example in prayer. Indeed, it was his own prayer life which led his disciples to the request, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1-4). He is our example also in self-denial and cross-bearing. The very cross which is the symbol of his free gift of grace to us is also the symbol of his highest claim upon us. "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). The early Christians, who were quite clear on being saved by grace, were also clear on this point. Paul urged the Philippians to have the mind of Christ as exemplified in the cross (Philippians 2:5-8). The writer to the Hebrews made his climaxing exhortation on this theme. "Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Hebrews 12:3, 4). It is noteworthy that the classic phrase, "in his steps," is set in this same framework. "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21).

Through the centuries and today the high moral example of Jesus has been variedly discounted. Some have objected to "example-ism" in order to make clear that we

are saved by faith and not by works. Others have objected to such a view of Christ's example as perfectionism. It overlooks the depths of sin in man's nature, it is argued, and, at best, it covers up by hypocrisy the pride of moral achievement which besets those who pretend to follow in his steps. Underlying these objections is the assumption that Jesus Christ is divine and we are human and therefore he cannot serve as our moral example. But the Biblical record is explicit and the logic is clear. The man Christ Jesus is our moral example.

A Sympathetic Redeemer

The humanity of Jesus Christ means also that his work for our redemption is valid. Let us grant readily that our sins require that something be done for us which we cannot do for ourselves. Indeed, the high moral example of Jesus Christ intensifies for us this need of help. It is equally certain that this help must come from God himself. In the whole drama of redemption the deity of Christ is a basic element of Christian belief. But his real humanity is likewise basic. It is a God-man who closes the gap between God and man. "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). No one in the New Testament exalts the person of Jesus Christ more than does the writer to the Hebrews. But he also affirms with equal stress the actuality of his humanity. This is done, moreover, in terms of his redemptive work as our faithful high priest. The fuller meaning of the atonement will be discussed later. Our present stress is on the relevance of Christ's humanity to that belief. "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Hebrews 4:15).

The Word Was Made Flesh

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" is a benediction prayer which is based on our beliefs about his person and about his work. We have explored one belief about his person — that he was a man. As Carlyle put it, he was "a man who ate victuals." He was a Palestinian Jew. And Shakespeare, in *The Merchant of Venice,* says, "Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?" It is the Christian's belief that he was such a man. To be sure, many of the last generation's "Lives" of Jesus were written from a limited or mistaken point of view. "Liberal" and "modern" theology omitted much of essential Christian belief about Jesus Christ. The attempts to delineate the character of "the Jesus of history" apart from the full Biblical belief about his person and work are under justifiable criticism in current theological thought. But present-day correctives, even though under the guise of "orthodoxy," swing the pendulum too far in the opposite direction. They stress the "Christ of faith" with little or no reference to what Jesus Christ was like "in the days of his flesh." In the name of the divine they overlook the human side of the incarnation.

No more impressive and satisfying discussion of the broader theological aspects of current Christology has appeared than Professor Donald M. Baillie's *God Was in Christ.* He cuts a path through the confusion in these summarizing words:

> If it is true that "no man can say, Jesus is Lord, except in the Holy Spirit," it is equally true that no man can say it, in the truly Christian sense, except through a knowledge of what Jesus actually was, as a human personality, in the days of His flesh. In the ages of authority Christians may indeed have largely dispensed with this, and Christian faith, however impoverished, managed to live without it. But in the modern age of criticism and questioning,

the rediscovery of the human historical personality came as a new realization of the historical content of the dogmas: men found in the Gospel story a real human personality which constrained them to say, with the Church and in the Holy Spirit, "Jesus is Lord," and "God was in Christ," and "The Word was made flesh."[1]

This modern rediscovery of the man Christ Jesus finds its valid sources in the New Testament, as this chapter has sought to show. In these sources, however, another conviction is equally clear. Jesus Christ was more than a man. The Christian faith includes the belief also in the deity of Christ. To that we shall turn in the next chapter.

[1] D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (New York: Scribners, 1948), page 52.

CHAPTER THREE

Christ, the Son of the Living God

JESUS CHRIST IS SUCH A MAN THAT HE HAS ALWAYS BEEN regarded as more than a man. Nearly a century ago Horace Bushnell wrote a book entitled *The Character of Jesus* and added as a subtitle "Forbidding His Possible Classification With Men."[1] A modern book is more tempered than that but calls attention to the same insistence of Christians that Christ was more than a man.

> It would be impossible to show that any of the many ways in which Jesus has been interpreted in the Church — whether as Messiah, Son of God, Logos, Lord and Savior, or under any other title— is essential to the Church's life, but I see no reason to suppose that the Church could long survive the surrender of the belief that the career of Jesus marks a supremely significant moment in the life of man. One who finds himself compelled to give up that belief and to regard Jesus merely as prophet or saint or as a member of some other human category—however high that category may be—such a person has severed one of the ties binding him to the historic Church.[2]

These views reflect briefly and perhaps dimly what is claimant and many splendored in the New Testament. There is no formal or schematized doctrine of Christ's deity there. Indeed, the New Testament is not primarily an outline of Christian doctrine. But we do find there certain lines along which the early followers of Jesus Christ were convinced of his exalted nature and the ways in which they sought to express this conviction.

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[1] Horace Bushnell, *The Character of Jesus* (New York: Scribners, 1860).
[2] John Knox, *The Man Christ Jesus* (Chicago: Willett, Clark, and Company, 1942), page 17.

Evidences of Christ's Deity

The reasons for believing in Christ's deity center in the kind of person he was, the kind of work he accomplished, and the miraculous way in which his career on earth began and ended.

A Man of Authority

The first disciples were very early impressed by a special authority which accompanied what he did and what he said. This was noted when he calmed the storm on Galilee and they remarked, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?" (Mark 4:41). It was noted in the healings he wrought, especially, but not only, the healing of those possessed. In one vivid instance the possessed one cried out, "I know who you are, the Holy One of God." All those who were present were amazed and queried, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" (Mark 1:27). The performance of such miracles need not have raised him above other prophets or wonder-workers. Moreover, he was not performing these works as signs to demonstrate his authority. But there appears to have been an assurance in his work which gave people a sense of his authority.

This same quality marked his teachings. We shall consider these more fully later but it is in place here to note how they conveyed the sense of a superior quality in his person. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount "the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7:28, 29). In the course of that sermon he had repeatedly set his own authority up as superior to that of Moses and of them of old. His claim was calmly assumed in the words, "but I say unto you."

A Man of Flawless Character

Closely related to this authority is the integrity and flawlessness of his character.

In the beginning of his public ministry John the Baptist said to him, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" (Matthew 3:14). Simon Peter's experience in the great draught of fish took a strange turn. "He fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord' " (Luke 5:8).

As Jesus spoke of his relation to the Father there is no note of sin or of repentance. His mood is one which would be brazen arrogance were it not due to genuine purity of life and devotion. "I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him" (John 8:28, 29). "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). All others of the world's saints show a keener sense of sin as they come closer to the purity of God. Jesus, however, shows no such feeling. Accordingly the New Testament speaks of his sinlessness. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The full range and nature of Christ's moral excellence are indicated by the writer to the Hebrews, who speaks of him as "one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (4:15b).

One Who Did What God Does

Jesus Christ also exercised the functions of deity. An early conflict arose with his enemies because he presumed to forgive sins. To the paralytic carried by four men Jesus said, "My son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). The Pharisees were logical in their question, "Who can

forgive sins but God only?" If Jesus Christ was not divine, then indeed he was blasphemous as they concluded. To the sinful woman who anointed his feet in Simon's house he likewise said, "Your sins are forgiven." This raised among the guests the same logical query, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" (Luke 7:48, 49).

Not only did he forgive sins but he also accepted worship. Perhaps the worship of people he healed was extreme courtesy and respect (Mark 1:40; 5:22; 7:25). Some versions use the word *knelt* instead of *worshiped.* But the worship of the disciples as they had come to know their Lord was of a genuine type freely and knowingly given. After Peter's futile attempt to walk on the water, he was caught by the hand and the storm was stilled. "And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God' " (Matthew 14:33).

After his resurrection this sense of awe in his presence was greatly heightened and on occasion they worshiped him accordingly (Matthew 28:9). Jesus Christ had come to do for them what he has been doing for his followers ever since—taking the place of God for them. "No doubt they thought of him as under God," writes Bishop Gore. "But within the sphere of their personal lives, he had been growing to have to them the values of God, as the object of their absolute faith, their infallible refuge and informer and protector and guide."[3]

The Aura of His Personality

The ascription of deity to Jesus Christ cannot be based alone on any one aspect of what he was or did. It is rather the inference from the total aura of his personality. What he was in himself, as is true of all personal relations, was transmitted to his followers by the total impact of his

[3] Charles Gore, *Belief in Christ* (New York: Scribners, 1923), page 53.

personality. W. Norman Pittenger sums it up this way:

> It is not that they have found only the attraction of one who is holy; nor only that they have been moved by a profound devotion to the ideal; nor only that they have been brought to their knees by purity of living; nor only that they have been impressed by nobility of teaching; nor even that they have been moved by profound and filial love to God. All of these things, in their degree, have been true. . . . It is Jesus, in the totality of his impact upon men, an impact apprehended in its deepest reality by the faith which has been awakened and the glad surrender that has been evoked, as being himself God's act for men, in men, to men, and as man.[4]

His own moving among his disciples was done with an assurance of being someone of exalted importance. He assumed a role in their midst which can be regarded as genuine only on the basis of his divinity. To be sure, he acted always in meekness and humility. He was among them as one who came to minister and not to be ministered unto. He disclaimed being the type of Messiah who exercised worldly power. He spoke of himself chiefly as the Son of man. This disarming humility, however, did not detract from the immense personal authority he exercised in the total impact of his personality upon his followers. His use of the title of Son of man applied not only to the humble and self-effacing work he wrought on earth. He used it also to apply to himself as a glorified judge and king in the future. He taught as if his statements were certainly true. His claims on his disciples were exclusive, as from one who is the sole representative of God. He accepted the designations of Son of God, Messiah, and King. His own conception of himself was no less than the aura of his personality as he lived among his followers.

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[4] W. Norman Pittenger, *Christ and Christian Faith* (New York: Round Table Press, 1941), pages 44, 45.

As we read the New Testament to see why Jesus of Nazareth was accorded divine status we shall have to look at the two miracles which attended the beginning and the end of his earthly life, viz., the virgin birth and his resurrection from the dead. We look at them here to see their relation to his person.

The Virgin Birth

There is a type of argument for Christ's deity which follows this logic: The Scripture records, being inspired by the Holy Spirit, are infallibly correct in every point. The Scriptures report that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit by the Virgin Mary. Therefore, the argument concludes, Jesus Christ was divine and all he said or did was by divine authority. As we have considered above the manner in which belief in his deity unfolded upon his followers, the primary evidence appears to have been from his person and work. The birth stories are related to this conviction as corroboration. Jesus does not appear to have authenticated his ministry by showing a divine birth certificate. In the nature of the case such a miracle is extremely private and Mary could only ponder the matter in her heart (Luke 2:19).

There is another type of argument which runs in a different direction. It is argued that the birth stories were legendary and were added to the Gospel story without authentic foundation. This is argued on the basis of the silence of Mark, John, and Paul, all of whom believe in Christ's deity. They do not seem to regard the virgin birth as a necessary foundation for belief in his deity.

This latter discounting of the birth stories in Matthew and in Luke, on the basis of silence, appears to grow, rather, out of prejudice against the possibility of miracle. Mark speaks straight away of "the gospel of Jesus Christ,

the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). John states the explicit incarnation belief, "And the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). Paul gives a similar equivalent, "God sent forth his Son, born of woman" (Galatians 4:4). Moreover, it is worth noting that Luke's Gospel was written by a physician whose writings were based on investigations of extreme care (Luke 1:1-4). It is beside the point therefore to argue against the virgin birth on the basis of the silence of Mark, John, and Paul.

It is likewise beside the point to try to prove or disprove it on the basis of the natural sciences. If there is no other authenticated parallel to be found in nature, that does not disprove this instance. In the nature of the case Jesus Christ is regarded as himself without parallel. If there were other parallel cases, they might make it easier for skeptical minds to accept this one as a fact. But that might, at the same time, make it more difficult for them to discern and acknowledge the uniqueness of Jesus in the spiritual and moral realm. Indeed, there are people, like the Moslems, who accept the miracle of the virgin birth but who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as divine.

We would be in a somewhat confusing situation if the virgin birth were the only indication of the deity of Christ. That would obscure the spiritual and moral significance of his deity, which, as we have seen above, is attested along other lines. Once we see the matchless character and the high authority of Jesus Christ as the Son of God we can agree with Bishop Gore's conclusion: "So far from finding a difficulty in the Virgin Birth of Jesus we will welcome it as in the highest degree acceptable and congruous in his case, if not rationally necessary."[5]

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[5] *Op. cit.*, page 279.

The Resurrection

In the case of the miracle of the resurrection we are dealing with a far more open and public matter. In the New Testament it is likewise a more central and evidential matter for Christ's followers. This thread is woven into the whole fabric of their belief and their witness. It is well attested in the very earliest writings and they are based on the direct report of eyewitnesses.

Paul learned from the other apostles "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:3-7). This testimony was corroborated in his own experience. "Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" (verse 8).

The Gospels give vivid eyewitness accounts of the resurrection, including the story of the empty tomb, seeing his visible body, and hearing his audible words. Rather than being an illusion growing out of their fevered hopes it was an amazing surprise which had to overcome their own disbelief. Thomas would not believe that the others had seen the Lord. "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). A week later he had the opportunity to do just that although Jesus gave him the gentle rebuke, "Do not be faithless, but believing" (verse 27). He, the greatest doubter among them, cried out, "My Lord and my God!" (verse 28).

These accounts are regarded by even critical historians

as obviously reports from eyewitnesses. Dr. A. T. Olmstead, the noted historian of ancient Near Eastern countries, makes this summary comment, "If modern scholars do not accept the vision as objective reality, the blame should be laid on the psychologist and not on the historian."[6] He goes on to observe the place the resurrection had in the disciples' experience.

> Such appearances are absolutely demanded to explain the sudden shift in the feeling of the disciples, one day mourning and weeping, in fear, disillusioned, the next going forth joyfully to danger and death, and always preaching as the one absolute dogma of the new faith the belief in the resurrection.[7]

There is an air of mystery about certain aspects of the risen Christ. Closed doors were no barrier to his travel. Even those who knew him best could not always recognize him at first. He could eat on occasion but did not appear to require food constantly. Having no other parallels to use in describing their experiences with him, they found even their best language carrying an air of inadequacy. Beyond all their powers to report, these encounters with the risen Lord were real to them without any doubt.

It appears convincing then that the climaxing confirmation of their belief in his deity was in the miracle of his resurrection. What was true for them has been transmitted through their writings and through the perpetual witness of the Holy Spirit to the church fellowship down through the centuries. The fixing of Sunday as the Lord's Day and the annual celebration of Easter are recurrent witnesses to the central and certain place this event has for Christian believers.

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[6] A. T. Olmstead, *Jesus in the Light of History* (New York: Scribners, 1942), page 249.

[7] *Ibid.*, page 252.

Views of Christ's Dual Nature

We have had a look at the two convictions Christian believers have had about the person of Jesus Christ. They are convinced of his true humanity. They are also convinced of his deity.

The Biblical Terminology

Accordingly the New Testament speaks of him as Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter's son, friend of sinners, prophet, teacher, and son of David. It speaks of him also as the Son of man, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the King of the Jews, the Savior of the world. It uses concepts of a philosophical type such as the effulgence of God's glory, the express image of his substance, and the Logos. The word *Logos* had a wide usage among Stoics as the principle of divine reason which gave the world meaning. It was approximated among Jews by the word *Wisdom*. In John's Gospel this Logos or Word is regarded as divine, just as among the Stoics. But John also affirmed that this divine Word became flesh.

Perhaps the most characteristic title ascribed to Jesus Christ in the New Testament was Lord. He was Lord of Glory and Lord of Life. This was a most exalted term both among Jews and among pagans. Among the Jews it had come to be used for the living God himself, for they came to regard his personal name, Jehovah, as too sacred to be spoken. For Gentiles, the word *Lord* had taken on an exalted and divine meaning, especially in the mystery cults. Consequently the use of *Lord* as a title for Jesus Christ was for the New Testament church the equivalent of calling him God.

A Classic Statement

The later history of thought about Christ's person is a record of much confusion and of much distressing

political conflict. Behind these earlier Christological controversies, however, was a serious concern to think of Jesus Christ in such terms as would preserve the two convictions about his real humanity and his real deity. The classic statement of this belief was worked out at Chalcedon in 451. The statement affirmed that Jesus Christ was "perfect in Godhead . . . perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man . . . consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin."[8]

All of this was to make the above twin convictions explicit. In attempting to affirm the unity of Christ's person they affirmed that he was "acknowledged in two natures . . . concurring in one Person." While we may not think in such terms today and while the New Testament itself does not appear to regard neat metaphysical formulas as necessary for Christian salvation, it is hardly necessary to dismiss such attempts at formulating belief as insignificant. Perhaps we can agree with John Whale's comment:

> By confessing One Person in Two Natures, the official Christology of Christendom raises many unsolved problems and lays itself open to damaging criticism through the use of such categories; but it has one great abiding merit: it leaves the paradox of Christ's Person as such, and in so doing it safeguards the truth as it is in Jesus, given to us forever in the pages of the New Testament and in the ongoing life of the Church.[9]

Attempts will constantly be made to clarify and enrich for our minds the meaning of the incarnation. These attempts will be based on the primary data of the New

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[8] Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1877), Volume II, page 62.

[9] John S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1941), page 122.

Testament. They will need to use categories of thought that are current at the time of each formulation. They should always seek to interpret the experience the Christian believer has of the living Lord Jesus Christ. There will, of necessity, always be a wide border of mystery around these formulations. The nature of one's own personality is itself mysterious indeed. One has two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, and so on to a countless number of ancestors, all of whom participate "substantially" in one's own personality.

If this is baffling to thought, how much more must it remain a mystery how "the Word became flesh." But the issue is a distinct person, "the man Christ Jesus," in whom "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9). What mattered in the New Testament was that "from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace . . . the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (John 1:16, 18). What mattered was that his ethical teachings were given with authority as the norms of God's kingdom (Matthew 5:20). What mattered was that the pathway to God was opened by God's own act of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19). What mattered was that the world-wide mission of the gospel was God's own assignment for men (Matthew 28:19, 20). What mattered was "that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also" (2 Corinthians 4:14). What mattered was that the community of believers in Christ became the household of God (Ephesians 2:19).

These are the things which matter today.

CHAPTER FOUR

He Went About Doing Good

NOW THAT WE HAVE CONSIDERED WHO JESUS CHRIST WAS AND is, we shall consider more explicitly what he did and does. There may seem to be an arbitrary logic in this order, for men saw what he did before they knew who he was. In the midst of his public ministry they kept asking, "Who is this?" (Luke 5:21; 7:49; 9:9). He also raised the question with his disciples at a critical period in their training. "Who do men say that I am?" (Mark 8:27). After Peter's confession that he was "the Christ of God," however, everything he did took on new significance.

Since that time all Christian believers look at what he did through the eyes of faith. They see what he did and does in terms of the kind of person they acknowledge him to be. Exalting his person does not minimize the importance of his work. He came not merely to be something but also to do something. At the age of twelve he felt that he must be in his Father's house and about his business (Luke 2:49). His public ministry was announced as similar to what God is doing. "My Father is working still, and I am working" (John 5:17). There was also an urgency about what he did. "We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work" (John 9:4). Let us look at the things he did.

He Achieved an Exemplary Character

This might seem closer to what he was than to what he did. As we looked in a former chapter at the qualities

of his character we noted, however, that his mature character was the result of struggle and development. Only so could he be regarded as truly man. When he was left behind in Jerusalem at the age of twelve his youthful eagerness was brought under parental control. He "was obedient to them" and returned to Nazareth. In this situation "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:48-52). His temptation in the wilderness was an experience of serious duration. Apparently God's will for the Messiah had to be discovered by discerning interpretation of Scripture and by difficult and courageous choices. His prayer life had a glad and joyous quality about it which bubbled up easily into thankfulness and praise. But it also had an earnestness and duration about it which indicated struggle and exercise. Before he called his twelve disciples he continued all night in prayer to God (Luke 6:12). He urged to his disciples that men should always pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1). Nothing is clearer from his Gethsemane agony than that the character that he had was an achievement.

He achieved this character in typical human circumstances. He was born of a woman, and born under the Law. He grew up in a home and learned obedience through what he suffered. He carried responsibilities in the home until he was thirty years old. He went up to the Jerusalem temple celebrations, as his parents did, according to custom (Luke 2:41, 42). He attended the Nazareth synagogue, also "as his custom was" (Luke 4:16). While his formal education was limited, he was eager to learn from the Scriptures (Luke 2:46, 47). He had pondered them deeply and had studied them with a discerning mind.

It is an unmerited favor indeed which God has given

to men in so good a man as Christ Jesus. This grace of God in Christ enabled him to achieve so exemplary a character. The acknowledgement of his own sinlessness and the confession of him as our divine Lord and Savior does not rule him out as our example. The main goal of Christian growth in the church is to attain "to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

He Engaged in Works of Mercy

We have already considered his compassion from which his works of mercy flowed. We have also noted that he regarded this as a work of God. This gives us a clue to one meaning of the kingdom of God.

A Clue to the Kingdom

The kingdom or rule of God was at hand in his works of mercy. "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20). He made the same identification in sending out the Seventy. "Whenever you enter a town and they receive you . . . heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you' " (Luke 10:8, 9). His works of mercy included the feeding of the hungry, as in the familiar instance of feeding five thousand.

But the major form of helpfulness was in the art of healing. All of the Gospels are studded with instances of his healing work. He healed all manner of illnesses. He healed, at times, during the day and on into the evening. He healed people he met "on the way" and he also gave special periods to healing all who came crowding to him. He healed many of specific physical disabilities ranging

from "flow of blood" to blindness, and from fever to leprosy.

If he could be said to have had a specialty it was in the realm of diseases involving the spirit as much as the body of the patient. Our present generation is keenly aware of the complications between mind and body which mark human illnesses. Jesus of Nazareth anticipated this understanding by nearly twenty centuries. The nature of mental illness, involving as it does attitudes of hatred and jealousy as well as feelings of inferiority and guilt, gives special relevance to the conception current in Jesus' time that exorcism of unclean spirits is necessary to attain wholeness. Jesus healed men rather than diseases. He gave generous energy and unfailing compassion to all whom he met. "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Matthew 8:17).

His works of mercy thus were regarded by Jesus as a work of God. He regarded them as the coming of his kingdom and the extension of his rule. The problem of human suffering is a baffling philosophical problem to which much careful thought has been given. Jesus cut through the tangles of this as an intellectual problem and gave a direct and practical answer to it. When questioned about why the young man in Jerusalem was born blind he replied, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him" (John 9:3). All the works of mercy, which Jesus performed out of compassion for men in need, were also expressions of God's own love for them.

They need to be looked at in the perspective of Christ's total work. From one angle it is clear that he healed and fed men out of sheer uncalculating compassion. His was a direct response to man's immediate and obvious need. No other warrant was necessary. He played no

favorites, but responded to suffering regardless of race or creed.

But from another angle his works of mercy were correlated with his messianic mission. He was concerned lest the reputation he received as a healer and feeder of multitudes would distort in the public mind the nature of his messiahship. He charged the cleansed leper to tell no one. When he did so all the more and great multitudes gathered to be healed, Jesus withdrew to the wilderness and prayed (Luke 5:14-16). After he had fed the five thousand he faced a similar issue. "Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the hills by himself" (John 6:15). No wonder he said, "This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah" (Luke 11:29). Can this be one meaning of his first temptation in the wilderness—to turn stones into bread, whether for his personal use or in his messianic ministry? The answer is the same in both cases. "Man shall not live by bread alone" (Luke 4:4). "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life . . ." (John 6:27).

An Obligation on His Followers

The trenchant parables of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) and of the last judgment (Matthew 25:31-46) have burned this obligation permanently into the Christian conscience. This ministry of mercy was part of his future plan for his followers. "He who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father" (John 14:12). Such has been the warrant and commission for all the works of charity which Christians have done in Christ's name. This amazing amount of eleemosynary

activity, or charitable effort, by Christians is indeed the outflowing of the grace of Christ.

He Taught Men the Truth

We have already noted the many titles which have been ascribed to Jesus, indicating the varied roles he exercised. All that he did must be thought of together as we consider his full ministry.

Jesus was far more than a teacher. But he was a teacher and he did teach. He was born a Jew and the Jewish faith was a teaching faith. For Jews the words of God were transmitted by teaching. "And you shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (Deuteronomy 11:19). He grew up in Nazareth as a child of the synagogue where teaching rather than ritual was the major religious exercise. The Scriptures on which he was nurtured were themselves an instrument of instruction.

Accordingly, in Jesus' short public ministry much time and much energy were given to the work of teaching men the truth. In the beginning "he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues" (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:39). At the end "he was teaching daily in the temple" (Luke 19:47). The tax collectors regarded him in this role and said, "Teacher, what shall we do?" (Luke 3:12). The scribes and Pharisees addressed him likewise: "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you" (Matthew 12:38). While some regarded him with suspicion, others acknowledged him with high respect. "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God" (John 3:2).

His major work as teacher centered in the followers whom he gathered about him. They were called disciples and traveled about with him in the manner of schools of

prophets or peripatetic philosophers. Twelve of these were especially chosen "to be with him" (Mark 3:14). On occasion his disciples numbered as many as seventy (Luke 10:1, 17).

In addition to these, who were closer to him, there were "the multitudes" who gathered about him in the villages, by the seaside, and elsewhere. Even in the privacy of his retreat five thousand followed him. "And he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34).

Words and Deeds Are Both Important

As a teacher he used words and he used them well. In one sense he minimized words. Men who pray to God are not heard for their many words. "Do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do" (Matthew 6:7). Discipleship is not measured by saying, "Lord, Lord," but by doing the will of the Father in heaven (Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46). The teaching of Jesus was done in the continuing and intimate fellowship of his band of disciples. It thus included much more than formal speaking. Eating and traveling, praying and healing, fishing and visiting all had a place in their curriculum. The use of natural occasions, of group participation, and of dynamic interplay was a part of his creative teaching method.

What Jesus himself did and was gave point and power to all he said. No one ever used words more frugally than he did. "His sayings are actions and not adjustments of concepts. He speaks in the lowest abstractions that language is capable of, if it is to be language at all and not the fact itself."[1] The Christian revelation is not

[1] A. N. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), page 57. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

primarily a set of wise sayings. God revealed himself through the Word made flesh. It was "truth through personality." The truth Jesus revealed was so much of a personal quality that he declared to his disciples, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Nevertheless, Jesus used words and he used them well. He carried on conversation and he made public addresses. His going about doing good included communication by talk and sayings. What he did required interpretation. The person that he was revealed itself by his teachings.

He Taught With Grace and Authority

What was the manner of his teaching? For one thing, he taught with charm and grace. His visit to Nazareth after his temptation ended on the verge of violence. But the people had been stirred by his speech in the synagogue. "And all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth" (Luke 4:22). Multitudes were drawn to him. "The great throng heard him gladly" (Mark 12:37). Even the soldiers who were sent to arrest him came back empty handed with the explanation, "No man ever spoke like this man" (John 7:46).

We have no record of the tone or quality of his voice; nor can we tell how much of the grace of his speech was expressed in the music of his words. We know a little about his gestures and more about the settings of his teaching. Presumably one who talked out of doors as he did and to multitudes who hung upon his words would develop skill in the art of forceful speaking. Presumably he suited the tone and quality of voice to the thing he said, using tenderness when taking little children in his arms to bless them (Mark 10:16); severity, when making prophetic judgments: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Beth-

saida!" (Luke 10:13); teasing laughter with his hyperboles: "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" (Luke 6:41); heated urgency, when cleansing the temple: "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade" (John 2:16); cheerful comfort in his invitation, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28); and plaintive sorrow in his lament, "O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34).

In the form and style of his teachings he was an artist indeed. Here the grace and charm of his manner are clear. Without the writing of books and, for the most part, without formal presentation of his teachings, they were remembered amazingly well. His traveling conversations, his occasional instruction, and his table talk stuck in the minds of his hearers because of their striking form. He used proverbs which we would regard as "quotable quotes." "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Mark 2:17). "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). He used hyperbole and paradox with striking effect. "You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!" (Matthew 23:24). "For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:35).

His distinctive teaching form was the parable, or analogy in story form. The parables usually have but one point and it is gratuitous to strain for significance in each element in them. The parables were spoken to plain

and simple people and were obviously intended to make moral and religious truth clear and persuasive. Yet they required a hearing ear and might miss their objective of instruction and appeal. In such case they became themselves a judgment upon those who might have received their truth. Through the centuries the grace of Jesus' teachings has been offered to men in his matchless parables. Who can calculate the telling effect of them: the sower and the soil (Luke 8:4-15); the house on rock or sand (Luke 6:47-49); the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37); the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32); the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46)? The people marveled then and we marvel still "at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth."

Another element in his manner of teaching is that he taught with authority. This is specifically recorded at the outset of his work in Capernaum (Mark 1:22) and at the end of his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:29). But the air of authority clusters around all of his sayings. He did not teach with the authority of office or of formal learning as did the scribes and Pharisees. He did, however, possess knowledge of the Scriptures which amazed the doctors in the temple (Luke 2:46, 47) and enabled him to discomfit his accusers after their own rabbinical fashion (Luke 6:4; John 10:34-36). More characteristically, he used the Scriptures with fresh discernment and thus spoke with authority in correcting the current errors in their interpretation. "You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:29). "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice' " (Matthew 9:13). He taught with the self-substantiating authority of truth and of his own moral character. The response he would leave to the disposition of his hearers. "Because I tell you the truth, you do not

believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin?" (John 8:45, 46).

The full strength of his authority was exercised when he set his own discerning word up above the word of Moses and the ancient law. "You have heard that it was said. . . . But I say unto you . . ." (Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). It has been the Christian belief therefore that the words of Jesus Christ come to us with the ultimate authority of the voice of God. What he taught is not merely another set of sayings by another village sage, albeit wiser than all others. Dr. William A. Curtis of Edinburgh sums up this authoritative quality of his teaching as follows:

> It is noteworthy that it is in conversation and in discussion alone that His manner and thought and speech approaches to the rabbinical style, quoting, illustrating from Scripture, inferring, parrying, refuting, epitomizing the Law and the Prophets or the Commandments, and comparing commandments. When He is left to Himself and His heart and mind are overflowing, He speaks in quite other fashion. Calm, assured, lofty, persuasive, above the region of cloud and storm, He speaks like a spirit descending from the open heavens and exhaling upon earth the pure atmosphere of a serener world. In such passages, whether enunciating truths concerning God or principles for human life and fellowship, or statements regarding Himself and His mission, He leaves behind Him altogether the characteristic manner both of Scribes and Prophets, and utters sayings which ring with Divine assurance and with superhuman simplicity.[2]

Content and Emphases of His Teaching

The themes of his teaching are considered more fully in the other chapters of this handbook. But a brief glimpse should be given here as we consider the specific work of his public ministry "in the days of his flesh." Teaching

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[2] William A. Curtis, *Jesus Christ the Teacher* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), page 49. Reprinted by permission of the author.

men the truth was part of his saving work. The significance of his life and of his death finds illumination in the themes and content of his teaching. Through these, as well as through his deeds, we can see the mind and the will of God. His teachings do not easily fit into any scheme of systematic theology. But the recurrent emphases are clear. The central theme is God's kingdom and his righteousness. He was not talking to atheists but to a nation that passionately believed in God. They had accepted God's sovereign rule over heaven and earth and his special rule over Israel.

Jesus built upon this faith and showed that God's kingly rule was that of a sovereign father. Such a father was exacting and impartial indeed but he also sought out his children in love and mercy, and his rule was a rule of justice and love. While he had a special calling for Israel, he was the Father of all mankind. Not all are sons in the highest sense (Matthew 5:45) but the difference is one of inner spirit, not of race. That spirit may be in a Roman officer (Luke 7:9), or in a despised Samaritan of mixed breed (Luke 10:33). It is men like these who shall come into the kingdom while the men with pride of race are left outside (Matthew 8:5-13). He thus promised entrance into the kingdom to a group of people different from what most people expected. Not the rich but the poor; not the wise scribes but children; not righteous according to current reckoning but sinners who repented, whether harlots or despised tax collectors. God's forgiveness is available for such repentant sinners and they are called to be likewise forgiving of others.

God's rule was always in effect in the rain and the sunshine but it was being especially realized in Jesus' own ministry. In the driving out of demons he saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven (Luke 10:18) and the rule of God coming upon the people (Matthew 12:28). Both John

the Baptist and Jesus stressed the fullness of time and the specific advent of God's rule in the ministry of Jesus. The kingdom of God was at hand (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15). John had expected it to be a ministry chiefly of swift and severe judgment, but Jesus took his pattern from Isaiah's prophecy. In the Nazareth synagogue and in answering John's emissaries, he used this pattern from Isaiah to authenticate his work and to make clear that in it they should discern the "year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:16-21; 7:18-22).

The rule of God is a rule of righteousness. Jesus took this with new seriousness and laid its claims urgently upon his hearers. The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees must be surpassed (Matthew 5:20) and nothing less than God's own righteousness must be sought (Matthew 6:33). God's own perfection is the standard for men and no accommodations are allowed because of the hardness of men's hearts. It is not enough to abide by external codes of conduct. The inner motivation is even more important and must be purified. The rule of God requires single-hearted devotion. "No man can serve two masters. . . . But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:24, 33).

Moral concern based on the requirements of God's will is thus seen to be the recurrent theme of Jesus. His moral teachings are scattered through his parables and other sayings. They are gathered into characteristic form in the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon, according to Amos N. Wilder,

> has been accounted the most searching and powerful utterance we possess on what concerns the moral life. It awakens men to an immense seriousness and responsibility, and quickens the conscience to unsuspected ranges of obligation. It discovers man's moral nature to him. . . . Woe to him, indeed, who once hears or reads these words! For they are so formulated and proclaimed that the

obligation they impose is self-evident, and one can never thereafter free oneself of their burden. In this sense the sermon creates conscience where it did not before exist.[3]

His Teachings Are Relevant Today

The relevance of Jesus' moral teachings is a matter of much discussion and difference of opinion. They set a standard so high and lay a claim so strong that many attempts are made to reduce their authority or their relevance.

Some do this by questioning Jesus Christ's own authority. There are outright atheists or anti-Christian rebels like Nietzsche, who called Jesus' ethic a "slave morality," or Marx, who called religion "the opiate of the people." Such men are a challenge to, and judgment upon, Christians. The present study will have to deal more specifically, however, with questions raised within the Christian community.

There are others who say Jesus lived long ago in a prescientific culture and a preindustrial economy and therefore he could not be expected to be an adequate moral authority for us today. Such a view overlooks the profound similarities of ethical problems in all cultures. It overlooks the worth of naive and childlike insights into moral values. Honesty, friendliness, mutuality, and other virtues are especially illuminated by their simpler forms. Jesus knew his way around in the moral world of his day and his discerning simplicity is precisely the source of his moral authority.

Another way of minimizing Jesus' authority is claiming that he was expecting the imminent and apocalyptic coming of the kingdom of God. The judgment was immediately at hand and therefore he formulated an

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[3] *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1951), Volume VII, page 155.

"interim-ethic" for the brief period before the end. It is argued similarly about the early Christians that, since they expected an early end of the age, their understanding of Jesus' teachings cannot be applicable to the longer eras of history. This mode of thought overlooks the slow and steady durability of early Christian morals. It overlooks the independent discernments of Jesus. It is absurd to assume that Jesus, who set himself above Moses and against the Pharisees, would be mistakenly bound by the outlook of their current apocalypticism. In any case, moral insights are sharpened rather than distorted by the imminence of judgment.

Another way of minimizing Jesus' authority is to argue that all his precepts can be discovered in the sayings of the rabbis. There are many parallels to be found in the Jewish writings. But they represent "needles of truth in great stacks of straw." Jesus was original in his selectivity, as well as in his emphases. He added new dimensions to the meaning of love and forgiveness. He added matchless grace of presentation in parables. Most of all, he embodied his precepts in his own life. The moral authority of Jesus has not been minimized by these criticisms. The last word has always been his own. The centuries have enhanced rather than reduced his claim.

Some tend to reduce the relevance of Jesus' teaching by questioning the nature of his moral precepts. They regard them as an impossible ideal which serves mainly to produce despair of human achievement. Men are driven thus to repent and to throw themselves in faith upon the mercy of God. Those who attempt seriously to fulfill the precepts are called perfectionists and, it is argued, they are most liable to sin; for their very moral achievements produce a subtle pride which is the worst of sins. To be sure, such perfectionists are especially subject to

subtle temptations, but they are right in accepting the moral requirements of discipleship. In the face of Jesus' teachings they will always be unprofitable servants, for their moral efforts are always made with enabling grace, not in their own strength. Pride is a subtle force indeed and can infect both perfectionism and disavowal of perfectionism.

Others do not regard Jesus' moral precepts as legislation to be specifically obeyed. They represent rather a set of general principles to guide us in our ethical problems and a spirit which should animate us in our moral life. This view is a good corrective of the legalism which besets all moral concern. Jesus and Paul both leveled their criticism against the Pharisaic mode of thought. It has been well remarked that the Pharisees, the Jesuits, and the Puritans were all especially concerned with moral behavior and yet all of them became bywords of legalism. But it is easy to evade or thin down the obligations of Jesus' precepts by crying "legalism" or "moralism" and relegating their relevance to a general mood. They do represent general principles which need to be interpreted with imagination. But their relevance to modern problems should be seen as having the same sharp claim today as was true in Jesus' own time.

A third way of reducing the authority of Jesus' moral teachings is to limit the area of their claim. Monasticism sets up a high standard for the orders. Their members are called "religious" and the implication is clear that the laity are not expected to live by as high a standard. At the Reformation this double standard was abandoned for Protestants. But many of them set up a dualism between one's obligations as a church member and one's obligations as a citizen of the state. Another form of this dualism is to regard Jesus' precepts as applicable only to one's private

life in his family and in his personal relations with other men. Beyond that, "business is business." Many religious groups take Jesus' precepts seriously for their own total communal life. In fulfillment of this ideal they withdraw from the world and from participation in political activities. Dispensationalism limits the area of Jesus' precepts by postponing their application to a kingdom age which is in the future.[4]

In view of this dilemma of applying Jesus' exalted moral teachings to daily life, what position can we hold? For one thing, it is clear that they are not the central basis of Christian "salvation." Man is not saved by moral achievement but by grace through faith. While man is not saved *by* character, he is, however, saved *unto* character. "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46). "We entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain" (2 Corinthians 6:1).

Secondly, these precepts are indeed a counsel of perfection. "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). For the Christian the norm is not the average or the minimum, but the ideal and the true. Nothing less than this can be the good.

In the third place, the precepts of Jesus require constant interpretation to discover the terms in which his explicit commands apply to current issues. This is not to reduce their relevance, however, but to make it explicit.

Finally, high and rigorous as these precepts are, we cannot evade their claim upon us. They are stated in absolute terms as the will of God for men. Beyond questions of realism or relevance is the question of right.

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[4] Cf. *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford Press, 1917), footnote on Matthew 5, pages 999, 1000: "The Sermon on the Mount in its primary application gives neither the privilege nor the duty of the Church. These are found in the Epistles."

A man ought always to do what is right. These precepts set up standards of right for everybody. All men ought to follow the Golden Rule. All men ought to seek first God's rule and his righteousness. "No man can serve two masters." The claim of these precepts is especially strong upon avowed Christians. They know them better. They profess to follow Christ as Lord. They have especial grace through forgiveness of sin and the gift of God's Spirit which is available to them for such moral endeavor. This will, of course, issue in division and strain between these precepts and current codes of ethics. It will issue also in persecution, suffering, and sacrifice. But it is part of the realism of Jesus Christ that he anticipated it in his teaching and underwent it triumphantly in his life, death, and resurrection. We should not evade or water down this claim, or minimize what God can enable a redeemed man to do.

> We have been too prompt often to cry down the mandates on love, forgiveness, purity, and non-retaliation because we have failed to take account of the redemptive action of the gospel. There are levels of Christian attainment and endowment paid for at a great price, all too rarely exhibited. In some lives the generosities of God and the charities of Christ overflow in such measure that what can only be called moral miracles result; and man's ancient foes are decisively worsted.[5]

We have looked at the work of Christ[6] in his life and have noted that his grace was shown in the exemplary character he achieved, in his compassionate ministry of helpfulness, and in the truth that he disclosed as a teacher. Let us look now at his work of grace in terms of his death.

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[5] Amos N. Wilder, *op. cit.*, page 164.

[6] Another major aspect of Christ's work on earth was the establishment of a new community. This work is variously regarded as the inauguration of the kingdom of God and the founding of the church. While this work was first initiated during his public ministry, it was more fully established after his death. The chapters on the Holy Spirit and the church will give fuller consideration to this important work.

CHAPTER FIVE

Greater Love Hath No Man

We shall now explore the redemptive work of Christ which was wrought in and through his death. One is struck, first of all, by the large place in Christian belief given to Christ's death and to the events surrounding it. Many men have achieved sufficient fame for their birthdays to become noted holidays. It is the special feature of Jesus Christ's influence that the end of his life is given equal celebration with his birthday. Christmas and Easter are the high points of the Christian year. A large place is given to Christ's death in the Gospel records. Beginning with his final arrival in Jerusalem, over a third of the chapters are given to this material, a total of thirty-three out of eighty-nine chapters.

The symbol of Christ's death is the cross and this is the central symbol of Christianity. This symbol appears repeatedly in church architecture. It is a recurrent theme in Christian art and literature. It is dominant in hymnody, in ritual, and in all the language of devotion and worship. Discipline and penitence, guilt and forgiveness, sorrow and joy, death and life all find their deepest meaning in the symbol of the cross.

Some Preliminary Considerations

As we seek to understand this central fact of Christian salvation let us make first some preliminary clarifications and then consider the heart of redemption in the doctrine of the atonement.

A Redemptive Death Foreseen

In the first place, Christ foresaw his impending death and considered it as redemptive. It is hardly possible to determine when or even how Jesus came to foresee his death. Our former discussion of his real humanity would rule out the idea that he had a blueprint of his life miraculously mapped out for him. Artists who picture cross shadows on the floor of his Nazareth carpenter shop are using imagination true to later events but not based on the record.

We can be certain that Jesus had early premonitions of the kind of struggle he had ahead of him. His temptations in the wilderness, when seen through the later gloom of Gethsemane and the rebuke to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan" (Mark 8:33), indicate that he discerned a deep difference between his own messianic intentions and the popular expectations. His early rejection in Nazareth and the arrest and beheading of John made clear the grim terms of a prophet's career.

Repeated encounters with unbelief and opposition, even by the most religious leaders of synagogue and temple, indicated that if he went on with his intended work and the public officials went on with their lines of resistance a severe clash would be inevitable. He was familiar with the tragic history of earlier prophets in Israel. He no doubt lived close enough, in Nazareth, to Roman executions by crucifixion that the pattern of the cross was a dire threat to his mission.

As doors of acceptance increasingly closed upon him, he "began to teach . . . that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31). He also set the cross before his followers as the pattern of their discipleship (verse 34).

His last journey to Jerusalem was undertaken with clear knowledge of its tragic probabilities. "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death . . . and kill him; and after three days he will rise" (Mark 10:33, 34). We should not conclude that Jesus did this deliberately as a maneuver to get himself killed either as a martyr or as a redeemer. That would be the equivalent of suicide. He went to bear prophetic witness against the evils centering in the temple. He went to appeal once more to the nation that they follow the ways of God. He went as a new kind of messiah, "humble and mounted on an ass," to appeal to the people to follow a different pattern of life. "And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, 'Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace!' " (Luke 19:41, 42). This was the climax of the tension between prophet and people and the climax of their fateful rejection of him.

It is easier to trace the foreseen certainty of his death than to discern the foreseen redemptive effect of it. But when he viewed his work as a whole he said, "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The Gospels represent Jesus as coming to his task, according to a present-day scholar, "at the call of a prophetic voice and receiving, first the call to become, and then ordination as at once the Messiah of the Remnant and the *Suffering Servant of the Lord.*"[1] Judging by his own Scripture

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[1] John Wick Bowman, *The Intention of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1943), page 2. Used by permission. The full thesis of this impressive book is summarized this way: "Jesus and he alone was responsible for the fusion of the prophetic concepts noted, and everything he ever said or did was motivated by his 'intention' to fulfill the demands of the resultant Suffering Servant, Messiah of the Remnant concept" *(Ibid.)*.

quotations, Jesus was especially nurtured by Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and the Psalms. The role of the Servant which he espoused as the Messiah was especially nurtured by these portions from the Old Testament. A glimpse of this is given in a postresurrection statement he made to the disciples: "Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled. . . . Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead" (Luke 24:44, 46). Thus we see that Jesus was increasingly certain that the rejection and suffering he faced was the will of God for his messianic mission. He regarded this as the price of his redemptive work.

The certainty was wrought out as he endured the cross. The agony in Gethsemane and the cry of dereliction on the cross give us a glimpse of the struggle he underwent to discern and to follow this pathway. As he thus moved toward the cross, albeit one which others were laying on him, he deliberately chose the way of suffering for our redemption. He said significantly, "I lay down my life for the sheep. . . . No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:15, 18). One is reminded here of the French soldier who had only one arm. A lady said to him, "My poor soldier, it is too bad you lost your arm." He replied quickly, "Ah, madam! I did not lose it, I gave it!" The cross of Christ was foreseen by him and the pathway to it was deliberately chosen. It was not an inadvertance of public relations or a political miscalculation. He laid down his life for the sheep.

His Life and Death Belong Together

A second preliminary clarification which should be made is that the life of Christ and the death of Christ should be considered together as a redemptive unit. There

is sometimes a tendency to put emphasis on only one to the erroneous exclusion of the other. They belong together. The life of Christ preceded his death and gave meaning and moral significance to the cross. Do we presume that, if Jesus had been slaughtered with the other innocents in Bethlehem, his death would have the redemptive significance it came to have on Calvary? All his compassionate ministry, all his teachings, and all his matchless character gave substance and significance to his death. There were three men crucified on Calvary. The redemptive value of the middle cross lay in the life Jesus had lived and the kind of teachings he had given. One can say that his redemptive work did not inhere in his being dead so much as in the life he gave up in death. It has been suggested by Dr. John Whale that in the sacrifices of the Old Testament the significant point of the offering came when the worshiper or priest placed his hands on the head of the live animal and gave it over to God.

> Sacrifice is gravely misinterpreted when its meaning is limited to the death of the victim. Thus to isolate one element in the ritual is to misconceive its purpose, . . . not the destruction of life but the representative surrender of life. This is the God-given way whereby the sinner identifies himself with the life offered to God.[2]

Similarly, we can note that the point at which the blood of sacrifices had its sharpest potency was reached when it was being shed. "It is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life" (Leviticus 17:11). It was, so to speak, "live" blood that the priests used in their sprinkling ceremonies.[3] Accordingly, in the institution

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[2] John S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1941), page 84.

[3] This is all the more impressive since "for the ancient mind blood, even when shed, was still perilous and potent, full of latent life, and capable of working on persons or things in contact with it." James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Scribners, 1910), H. Wheeler Robinson's article on "Blood," Volume I, page 715.

of the communion rites, Christ said to his disciples, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (Mark 14:24). We have, therefore, in the wide use of "blood" in our salvation beliefs a vivid and profound symbol, not of mere death or deadness, but rather of life given up in death. It is the life given up which gives point and meaning to the death.

On the other hand, the death of Christ intensifies and seals all that he was and did in his life. It raises it all to the ultimate level of meaning and effectiveness. We acknowledge this in the familiar phrases, "the last drop of blood," and "the last full measure of devotion." Jesus Christ stated it in these words, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). In one sense, Jesus Christ, in his death, was acting in full harmony with his whole life and teaching. He had taken the role of the Servant in all his public ministry. Whether healing or teaching, he came not to be served but to serve. What he did in Jerusalem during his passion was a direct extension of the line of his whole life.

Bishop W. F. McDowell once likened this to an instance in a New England fishing village. In a sudden storm a fishing boat was capsized at a perilous distance from shore. Sandy was the stoutest swimmer and helped now one and now another of his comrades to reach safety. His strenuous efforts cost him his own life and the whole village was stunned by grief at this sudden turn of events. At the funeral, however, they were all lifted above their sorrow by the widow's brave and true words: "All during his life, if Sandy had anything his friends needed, he gladly gave it to them. At last they needed his life and he gladly gave them that!"

In another sense, however, the actual dying adds

greatly to all the life had meant hitherto. The act of pouring out blood goes far beyond the readiness to do it. We all recognize this on the rare occasions when men actually die as martyrs to a cause. They seal their witness with their blood. There is an intensity and finality about such an event that subdues men by its profound power. It reveals the depth and sincerity of the life's whole meaning. Only then can we see what the intention had been. We also recognize that the death represented a specific act which lifted the intention to the ultimate level of actuality. Jesus chose the way of the cross before he went to Jerusalem. He confirmed his choice in the agony of Gethsemane. But he endured the cross on Calvary. Our redemption was wrought in his death. "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3).

There Is Power in the Blood

There is always danger that we drift into morbidity in regard to the blood of Christ. Our liturgy and hymnody sometimes leave the impression that ours is a "slaughterhouse religion." The Roman Catholic *Miserere* and stress on the "Sacred Blood," the Moravian emphasis on the "wounds," and some of our gospel songs border on morbidity and tend to miss the glad and joyous quality of our faith.

But we can be in equal or worse error if we have fastidious distaste for the facts of life and death. There is a grim and glorious realism about our redemption as we learn of it in the New Testament. "You were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20). "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16). "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Our redemption is down to earth and deals with the basic elements of life.

There is always danger that we drift into morbidity in regard to the blood of Christ.

There is also danger that we drift into magic. The Roman Catholic belief in transubstantiation, according to which the consecration of the elements changes the wine into the substance of the blood, is an instance of this danger. The same is true when redemptive significance is sought in the chemistry of the blood. The danger of magic is present when the word *blood* and phrases about the blood are repeated as if the power lies in the words or as if we shall be saved by our much speaking. When we speak of blood we are speaking in symbols. In our ritual we use a long line of symbols. When we speak of the cup of blessing we use the word *cup* as a symbol for the actual cup. We use the actual cup as a symbol for the contents of it. We often use grape juice as a symbol for wine. We use wine, following Jesus Christ himself, as a symbol for his blood poured out. And the blood poured out is a symbol of the life he gave up in death.

We cannot say, however, that anything is "just a symbol." A symbol always is a sign which points to or signifies something other than itself. It nearly always points to something greater than itself. In matters of our redemption our symbols point to realities far greater than the symbols. They point to the blood of Christ the Son of God. And the blood represents the matchless and meaningful life which he laid down in sacrifice for our redemption. Paul put it simply when he spoke of "the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Blood is an elemental symbol. It is a vivid and accurate symbol of life given up. As long as we live by blood in our body and as long as we die when it is shed, it will remain as the proper symbol of Christ's redeeming act. It will always remain as the proper symbol

which unites what he did in life and what he did in death to redeem us.

The Meaning of the Atonement

We are now ready to consider more specifically the heart of redemption as involved in the doctrine of the atonement.

God's Saving Act Is First

We should note first of all that all thought about our redemption as Christians is reflection upon what God has done through Christ. We do not formulate a theory of salvation and then try to fit Christ into it. As Christians we start with the facts of the gospel and then try to clarify their meaning to our minds by reflection. Salvation is not produced by our thought. It is revealed as a fact or as an event which occurred at a point in history. It was on Good Friday under Pontius Pilate as to time and on Calvary outside a city wall as to place. In this sense salvation comes to us primarily as a witness and as a story rather than as a doctrine or a set of beliefs.

The long history of thought about the atonement is the history of Christian men's attempts to clarify the meaning of their salvation. The gospel has been preached and men have been saved in situations where no structured or logical theory of the atonement has had a part. The story of the crucifixion of Christ has had its own power over men's hearts and it has been power to save and to redeem. In the presence of the fact of the cross our theories and doctrinal formulations seem to shrivel.

Analogies from the long history of martyrdom, from the market where slaves are bought and sold, from the altar where lambs without blemish are offered up for man, from the court of law where debts are assessed and exacted, criminals are sentenced and penalties defined, from times of war when "substitutes" for conscripts

go to face death, from domestic and civil life where men lay down their life for their friends, from royal courts where majesty insulted has to be propitiated and reconciled, these have all been used in the effort of the human mind to find a formula which can sum up the meaning of the cross. But all together do not suffice to furnish the desired equation. Confronted by the emotions of the feeling heart they seem so many efforts to reckon the light of the sun in candle power.[4]

All theories are analogies and elaborated pictures to help our minds comprehend the full meaning and power of the cross. They seek to make clearer why it was necessary for Christ to suffer, what he effected in his death on the cross, and how his gracious work in dying bears upon our lives today.

We can see the nature and meaning of the cross in more personal terms if we consider it as reconciling us to God by the forgiveness of our sins. *Reconciliation* is the characteristic word in the New Testament rather than *atonement.* The word *atonement* appeared only in Romans 5:11 in the King James Version. It has been changed to *reconciliation* in later versions in the interests of accuracy of translation. *Reconciliation* is a broader term as well as a more personal one and it includes the central meaning of *atonement* as at-one-ment. In considering the forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation of man to God we shall anticipate later chapters of this study of belief, but the ideas are familiar ones in our Christian teaching and experience. Let us look first at the effects of sin in man and on God and then at how the cross overcomes them.

The Effects of Sin on Man

One effect of sin on man is the matter of guilt. The fact of sin is made obvious and terrible by the feeling of

[4] W. A. Curtis, *Jesus Christ the Teacher* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), page 164. Reprinted by permission of the author.

guilt which besets us all. This feeling that we have done wrong and are blameworthy may vary in poignancy and in pattern but it is a pervasive mark of human experience. It has driven men to extremes of anguish and of remedial effort. First-born sons have been offered up, the body has been starved or slashed, and milder forms of sacrifice have been used in search of expiation. Psychotherapy vies with religious revivalism as a proffered cure for the problems of guilt. In solitude and in society men are burdened with the age-old questions, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" (Jeremiah 8:22).

A second effect of sin is the feeling of alienation and estrangement. Man's guilt leaves him separated from God, much as we are loathe to meet those whom we have wronged. In addition to this evasiveness there is the sense of utter loneliness and of being forsaken. So long as guilt remains, this feeling of abandonment goes with it.

A third effect of sin on man is a sense of impotence and inadequacy. This effect stems from the other two —guilt and estrangement. This sense of inferiority affects the whole person and it is especially strong in the moral realm. William James has written memorably of this mood as against that of the muscular and self-assured person:

> The athletic attitude tends ever to break down, and inevitably does break down even in the most stalwart when the organism begins to decay, or when morbid fears invade the mind. To suggest personal will and effort to one all sicklied o'er with the sense of irremediable impotence is to suggest the most impossible of things. . . . Well, we are all such helpless failures in the last resort. The sanest and best of us are of one clay with lunatics and prison inmates, and death finally runs the robustest of us down. And whenever we feel this, such a sense of the vanity and provisionality of our voluntary career comes over us that all our morality appears but as a plaster hiding a sore it can never cure, and all our well-doing

as the hollowest substitute for that well-being that our lives ought to be grounded in, but alas! are not.[5]

The Effects of Sin on God

Now let us look at what man's sin does to God. We can be sure that God is not indifferent to anything in the moral realm. As the administrator of the moral order and the law of the harvest (Galatians 6:7, 8) he is affected by our sins.

In the first place, sin arouses God's righteous wrath. He cannot condone sin or brook evil. This conception is woven into the whole Biblical fabric. Whether we use the word *holiness* or *severity, anger* or *wrath,* we are dealing with a clear element in God's character. The wrath of God is not an impetuous instability of his character in the presence of personal insult. "The wrath of God is the active manifestation of his essential incapacity to be morally indifferent, and to let evil alone."[6] Evil touches a nerve in God. It goes against his grain. In addition to a kind of instinctive repulsion or wincing, God's wrath takes a positive form and he moves against evil and seeks to overcome it. Whether we try to think of this result as the working of impersonal moral law or whether we ascribe it, more Biblically, directly to God's wrath, we are speaking of something severe, impartial, and inevitable in the moral realm as a result of man's sin. A resistance is set up against it and judgment is encountered.

Another effect of sin on God is to arouse his loving compassion for the sinner. This note is less frequent but fully as explicit in the Bible. Its classic form is in John 3:16. The steps God took to reconcile the world to himself

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[5] *Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1902), pages 46, 47. Reprinted by permission of Paul R. Reynolds & Son, 599 Fifth Avenue, New York 17.

[6] R. H. Strachan, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935), page 117.

provide the glory and grandeur of the gospel. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

A third effect of sin on God is a compound of the other two. His hatred of sin and his love for the sinner produce tension and suffering in the heart of God. There are many theories offered as to why suffering is necessary in redemption. But we can go behind both redemption and suffering and find that they grow out of the dual effect of sin on the heart of God. He is holy and moves in wrath against sin. He is also loving and cannot give the sinner up. This tension and contradiction are absorbed in God's suffering love.

Suffering Makes Forgiveness Redemptive

How does forgiveness overcome these effects of sin? Against this background of the effects of sin in man and in God it can be discerned that forgiveness is redemptive only as it stems from such suffering love. The problem of guilt is thus met. The conscience of the sinner cannot be satisfied merely by being forgiven out of hand. Mere overlooking of sin may diminish the alienation somewhat but in our heart of hearts we feel the need of some deep expiation. We feel that the sin deserves punishment and that it cannot be easily condoned. Suffering, however, takes the full measure of our sin. It reckons with the seriousness of our offense. Suffering thus deals with the problem of guilt by the fact that our sins have been borne. They are absorbed in God's anguish and therefore not condoned or disregarded.

This is where we find the relevance of such words as *expiation, propitiation,* and *atonement.* The fact that we

are unable to make atonement adequately for ourselves and that it is done for us by another makes it essentially substitutionary. Since God in Christ has borne the burden of our sins in suffering, our consciences are satisfied and cleansed, for the true measure of our sin has been taken and the guilt has been dealt with. "For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Hebrews 9:13, 14).

The problem of alienation is also dealt with. Our sin has been borne in suffering and we have been forgiven out of a heart of love. This free offer of costly forgiveness actually effects the reconciliation between the estranged sinner and God. We have been accepted by the very One from whom we have been estranged and whose presence we had been evading at the same time we had longed for it. This offering of forgiveness is compounded of the wrath God has for our sin and the love he has for us. Because he takes the sin seriously and bears it in suffering, the guilt is overcome. Because he suffered for us and offers forgiveness freely, the alienation is overcome.

This removal of the guilt and the estrangement by forgiveness out of suffering goes far then toward overcoming the impotence caused by sin. Our inhibitions have been removed. Our contradictions have been resolved. Our gratitude has been evoked. A new sense of worth has been bestowed on us. No motivation on earth is greater than that of forgiveness out of a heart of suffering love. "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little" (Luke 7:47).

The Cross and God's Forgiveness

Let us now consider the place of the cross of Christ on Calvary in the forgiveness of our sins. We have been speaking in general terms of the relation between sinners and the redeeming love of God. How shall we relate this to the specific acts of Christ from which we gain our view of God?

First, we can say that God as revealed in Christ always suffers in the presence of sin. This is because his righteousness and his love are both eternal. Whenever sin occurs or wherever it exists, there is a divine reaction in the heart of God. This is the meaning of the idea that the Lamb has been foreknown and slain from the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8). This is the meaning also of the idea that men "crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt" (Hebrews 6:6).

In the second place, we can regard Calvary as the expression of this eternal attitude of God by the enactment of a redeeming deed in time. This deed of God in Christ goes beyond the general attitude and readiness of God just as any deed in time is a creative step beyond the intention which gave it birth. Peter speaks of Christ who "was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake" (1 Peter 1:20). This act on Calvary also takes on a finished and final character. It is finished and final as a revelation of the eternal heart of God. We would know little of God's eternal nature were it not for this act. It is finished and final also as a deed done for our redemption. This is the basis of the "onceness" and finality of the atonement.

The Scriptures are clear on regarding the event of Christ as the center of history, giving point to all that went before and to all that follows after. "The death he

died he died to sin, once for all" (Romans 6:10). "But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26). Calvary is thus to be regarded as more than a token or sample of God's general attitude. It is one climaxing forth-putting of God's energy to effect the forgiveness of our sins. It is the adequate event already enacted which divides the chronological calendar between B.C. and A.D. and the moral calendar between the Law and the gospel.

Objective and Subjective Atonement

It is important, however, to lay stress on both the objective and the subjective aspects of the atonement. The forgiveness of sins is made possible by what has already been done objectively. It is effective in the individual's salvation by what is brought about in his own subjective experience.

The objective theories are many and ancient. The ransom theory of Irenaeus, the satisfaction theory of Anselm, the penal satisfaction theory of the reformers, the *Christus Victor* theory recently made famous by Bishop Aulen, the blood-sacrifice theory which much popular preaching elaborates from the Epistle to the Hebrews—all of these lay stress on the finished work of Christ and on its substitutionary nature. They confront the sinner with something which has been done in order to relieve him of the burden of guilt and to overcome his estrangement and impotence. He is offered free forgiveness for his sins as he is met by the pursuant love of God. It is the power of the gospel that all this can be offered as finished and adequate and free. Another, the matchless Son of God, has already overcome evil and given his own life as atonement for man's sins. There is therefore a cure for sin and for its effects of guilt and alienation and impotence.

One can liken this to a ranger's comment in Rocky Mountain National Park. He said that if the average temperature there were lowered by a few degrees, more snow and ice would accumulate in winter than would melt in the summer. Over the years the park would be covered by an ice sheet and life would be untenable. No matter how hard the struggle, trees and animals would be doomed. But by the lifting of the average temperature a few degrees to where it is now, more ice and snow could be melted in summer than actually accumulates in winter. Life is tenable and trees cover the hills while animals and birds live in the valleys. The moral climate of the universe was changed at Calvary. This is the truth set forth in the objective theories.

But this fact is not the total picture. Forgiveness may be offered freely but it is not complete unless it is accepted as well as offered. Some subjective change must be undergone in the sinner's life before the transaction can be completed. This truth is the concern of the subjective theories. Forgiveness is thus effected by the impression made by Christ's death upon us. It must arouse us to repentance and to faith so that our salvation may occur. It must melt us down in sorrow and lift us up in hope. It must quicken within us the readiness to forgive our fellows. Then and only then will our heavenly Father forgive us. "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). This explains the power of the gospel as well as the seeming impotence of the gospel. The great Redeemer stands in radiance and love outside the door, knocking and awaiting our response and welcome before the great feast begins.

H. R. Mackintosh, in one of his sermons, puts his finger on the sore spot:

I feel that the great reason why we fail to understand Calvary is not merely that we are not profound enough. . . . We are such strangers to sacrifice that God's sacrifice leaves us bewildered. . . . We have never forgiven anybody at such cost as His. We have never taken the initiative in putting a quarrel right with His kind of unreserved willingness to suffer. It is our unlikeness to God that hangs on us as an obscuring screen impeding our view, and we see the atonement so often through the frosted glass of our lovelessness.

Hard as this appears to be, it is still the glory of the gospel that such reluctance and such obtuseness are overcome by the love of God and expressed in the death of Christ. All theories and metaphors of the atonement can be summed in Paul's simple but overwhelming phrase about "the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). An unidentified modern poet has put this with equally simple beauty:[7]

Under an eastern sky,
Amid a rabble cry,
A man went forth to die—
For me.

Thorn-crowned his blessed head,
Blood-stained his every tread,
Cross-laden on he sped—
For me.

Pierced were his hands and feet,
Three hours o'er him did beat
Fierce rays of noontide heat—
For me.

[7] Thomas Curtis Clark (ed.), *Today Is Mine* (New York: Harper), page 188.

The Love of God

Logically and historically the love of God is prior to the grace of Christ. All that Christ was and did is regarded as stemming from God's own love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). But as Christians we know the love of God through our experience of the grace of Christ. Our belief in God's love is no vague surmise but solid inference from Christ's work of revelation and of redemption. It is fitting, therefore, to consider more fully the Christian belief in God after we have already explored the meaning of belief in Christ and his grace. Many are the facets of Christ's life and work and they come to focus in his grace. Many are the aspects of God's nature and purpose and they come to focus in his love.

CHAPTER SIX

Our Father Who Art in Heaven

BELIEF IN GOD IS THE BASIS OF ALL RELIGION. A SENSE OF awe and a feeling of dependence toward a power beyond themselves is an almost universal mood of men. Men have within them an awareness that their weal and woe are ultimately in hands other than their own. There are few atheists in the world. Even in our own secular era, men who seem to live their lives apart from God often get caught up into fanaticism toward some other object. The false gods of pleasure, financial success, racial pride, and superpatriotism rush into the vacuum left by disbelief in the true God. When the unclean spirit returns to find the empty house swept and put in order he goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there. "And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first" (Luke 11:24-26).

The Bible gives little attention to arguments for God's existence. For the most part it is taken for granted or stated simply: "For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). The Bible is far more concerned about the nature and the character which men believe God to have. It is not enough to have a belief in a god. It is a matter of life and death for men to come to true knowledge of the true and living God. Neither in Biblical times nor now is it enough for the arguments of philosophy to demonstrate God's existence in a general way. It is all-important to know what kind of a being

God is. Men are called away from false gods to the true and living God. Worship of anything less than the true and living God is idolatry; and idolatry is a grievous business. At the best it is a witness to a hunger it can never satisfy.

The Nature of God As Father

What then is God like? The characteristic way the Christian conceives of him is as Father—"our Father who art in heaven." God, as Father, was foreshadowed in the Old Testament. "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him" (Psalm 103:13). "For I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born" (Jeremiah 31:9).

It cannot be said, therefore, that this is a completely new concept in the New Testament. But it is a dominant note there. Jesus Christ took this with a new seriousness and as the distinct characteristic of God. It was the central focus of his prayer life. In joy he prayed, "I thank thee, Father, . . . that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes" (Matthew 11:25). In sorrow he prayed, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36). His whole ministry was based on the Father's authority (John 5:19; 13:1). He sent out his disciples likewise under the Father's authority (Matthew 28:19). A specific part of his work was to show men what God the Father is like. "He who has seen me," he declared to his disciples, "has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

There are other Biblical terms for God, like Shepherd, King, the Most High, Ancient of Days, and Lord of heaven and earth. But for Christians all ways of thinking about God find their center and norm in the concept of

Father. This concept of Father, moreover, is filled out with rich meaning by the revealing work of Christ. God is no longer an unknown God. All the elusive attributes like inscrutability or ineffability have been broken through as we see the glory of God in the face of Christ. No better name for God can be found in all the world than "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:6; 2 Corinthians 1:3; Ephesians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3). No wonder then that the phrase, "the love of God," in the apostolic benediction is often used in the fuller form, "the love of God the Father." This shall be the focus of our thought as we consider the Christian doctrine of God in this and the next chapters.

God Is a Personal Being

Thinking of God as Father means that he is a personal being. It is a common feature of all simpler religions of the world to think personally and intimately of their gods. Nature powers like the sun, the winds, and the storm are regarded as personal powers. The same is true of other elements of experience like love, justice, fertility, and the tribe. In the Bible these are all regarded as idols, as "gods many and lords many," and as false objects of worship. But the same intensely personal quality attaches to the true God. He walks in Eden in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8). He is a friend to Abraham (2 Chronicles 20:7). Moses talks to him face to face (Exodus 33:11). God is jealous (Joel 2:18) and angry (Numbers 25:4) and repents that he has made man (Genesis 6:7). As against this anthropomorphism, or thinking of God in the form of man, there are other instances where he is conceived of in less intimate and more majestic terms like *Most High* (Numbers 24:16; Luke 1:35) and *Almighty* (Ruth 1:20).

Such Biblical stress on attributes never goes as far

from personal terms as philosophical thought does. Philosophers ancient and modern tend to think of God in abstract terms like *absolute idea, unmoved mover, ground of being, principle of concretion,* or *creative force.* In parts of the Bible God is given a personal name, *Jehovah.*[1] He is often given the title *Lord.* With similar frequency he is called what he definitely is, God. But all of these ways of referring to him retain a vivid and strong personal quality. When Jesus told the Samaritan woman that "God is spirit" (John 4:24) this was not to depersonalize him but to set forth a view of personal being which is not restricted to a Samaritan mountain as such or to Jerusalem as such. A widely known definition of God is that of William Newton Clarke: "God is the personal spirit, perfectly good, who, in holy love, creates, sustains and orders all."[2] In this God's nature is distinctly personal. But this does not mean that God has red hair or a physical body. It centers attention upon the spiritual, or non-physical, aspects of personal being. It refers to self-awareness, moral character, freely chosen intentions, just judgments, gracious love, capacity for communication and fellowship. It refers to such familiar personal experiences as thinking, feeling, and willing.

In our own time some people have difficulty in thinking of God as personal. Perhaps as children they thought of him as a benign and white-bearded patriarch sitting on a chair about a half-mile up in the sky. Then

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[1] The term *Jehovah* is usually regarded as a mixed word. It is made up primarily of the four Hebrew consonants *JHVH.* In the early Hebrew texts no vowels were included. Later the name was regarded as too sacred to be pronounced and the readers substituted the title *Lord* or *Adonai.* When vowels were added to the text underneath the consonants, they added the vowels of the word *Adonai* to the consonants *JHVH.* It was still read as *Lord* or *Adonai.* The American Version's attempt in 1901 to substitute *Jehovah* has been shortlived and the title *Lord* has been restored in the Revised Standard Version.

[2] William Newton Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology* (New York: Scribners, 1898), page 66.

they got a picture of the vastness of the starry heavens which shattered their childhood picture of God. They need to let their thinking about God grow as their astronomy has grown. They should read the Bible afresh to see God as one "who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heaven with a span" (Isaiah 40:12). They should also come to think of him as one not bound by space—as a living mind comprehending, choosing, creating, purposing, working toward an end. While the world is almost infinitely larger than a person, from a spatial point of view, yet it does not comprehend the person; the person comprehends and is aware of the world.

Others find it hard to think of God as personal because they regard personality as finite and limited, whereas God is infinite and unlimited. Some speak of the personality-producing forces of community life or of a personality-producing matrix. God is of course free from the imperfections found in human nature. In many ways he is "superpersonal." "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

To think of God as less than personal is an unwarranted type of reductionism—we cannot fully explain higher realities in terms of lower realities. Speaking of him as personal guards against the tendency to think of God as some object like a tree or a river or an ocean, or to think of him as an abstract idea or force of nature. It protects man's fellowship with God and preserves the whole rich range of meaning we find in the familiar words of the Lord's Prayer, "our Father who art in heaven." It is the basis of God's qualities of righteousness and love. It is the quality of God which marks his image in man. It is the sad measure of sin as guilt and alienation.

It is the glad feature of salvation as forgiveness and reconciliation. God's world is the world of persons.

God Has Authority and Power

Thinking of God as Father also implies that he has authority and power over the world and over men. This is set forth clearly in the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father who art in heaven. . . . Thy kingdom come." It is indicated also in the liturgical clause, "I believe in God the Father Almighty," and in the recurrent attribute, omnipotence. God is the kind of father who also exercises kingly rule. In the Old Testament, God is regarded as the true ruler over Israel. There was reluctance to establish a human kingship lest the sovereignty of God be overlooked. At the peak of the life of Israel's kingdom, the king himself was at best the anointed representative of God. "Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory" (Psalm 24:10). Sometimes this authority of God is overlooked in current thought about him. It is suggested, for example, that we should no longer speak of the kingdom of God but that we should speak of the democracy of God. This is to overlook, however, the whole range of God's sovereignty wherein he is quite prior to his world and quite above the men who are in it.

In our idea of God as Father we may forget the authority which the father exercised in the family life of Bible times. Often in the modern home the father is absent for days and the control of the home falls upon the mother. Often, in the name of freedom, the children are left entirely to their own independent choices. The father is a sort of benign resource for guaranteeing the fulfillment of the children's desires. If he seeks to exercise control in the life of the home, he is regarded as authoritarian and arbitrary.

No doubt this is a caricature. No doubt the father's authority has sometimes been abused and needs correction in the name of Christian love. No doubt the roles of ideal family life may change from age to age. But Jesus spoke of God as Father at a time when the father of the home was an old-fashioned Jewish "papa." It has been rightly said, "God is our Father, not our Grandmother." This mode of thought about God is not to picture him as harsh or domineering or vengeful, but as fulfilling the responsibility of fatherhood in rich and infinite love. "God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons" (Hebrews 12:7, 8).

God and the World

Thinking of God as Father is in harmony with the Biblical doctrine of creation. This is stated very simply in the first verse of the Bible. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

The Principle of Explanation

According to this belief, God is the first cause of the created world. He is the ultimate principle of explanation. In thinking of the origin of the world the human mind starts on a long and tantalizing journey. Back of each phenomenon of nature may be found a previous factor which was its cause. Back of that was another factor which caused it. This is the endless journey of "infinite regress" which keeps the philosophers awake at night. It is like a Royal Baking Powder tin which has on its label a picture of a Royal Baking Powder tin which has on its label. . . . It is not to stifle endless inquiry that Christian belief accepts God as the ultimate principle of explanation. It

is a belief, however, which gives the mind a place to start and a place to stand.

The Bible reflects a few assumptions about the process of creation. It was a process related to time.[3] It was a process of several successive steps. It was an organic process with each step related to the whole. It was a process which found its climax in the creation of man. It was an act and process of deliberated intention. It was an act and process pronounced good.

It is the concern of natural science to make inquiries into natural processes and to formulate theories as to the steps in nature's development. These are, in the nature of the case, descriptive inquiries which still leave the question of origin unanswered. Whether creation was by immediate and single act or by successive developmental steps is a question secondary to the principle of ultimate explanation.

Here is where the Christian belief in God centers its concern. The belief in God as creator is a profound and persuasive answer to this ultimate question. God is regarded as self-existent. The whole world of nature and the life of man are created and derived existences. The Creator has by definition an undenied priority and the world and man are dependent creatures. Perhaps we would be more exact theologically and linguistically if we say they are dependent *from* God instead of saying they are dependent *upon* God. For the word *depend* means to hang from. This simple change of preposition goes far to produce within us a true discernment of God's self-

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[3] Time for God, however, is not to be precisely reckoned with time as man knows it. "A thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8) is not a formula for exact calculation but an indication that time for God is not commensurable with time for man.

existence and of the derived character of the world and the life of man.[4]

The Living Source of Power and Order

God is not only the creator of the world as its ground of origin; he is also the sustainer of it as its constant ground of administration—"upholding the universe by his word of power" (Hebrews 1:3). According to this belief, God is not an absentee landlord who set things going in the beginning and then left them to run on their own. He is rather the living God who is constantly at work in the world. "My Father is working still, and I am working," said Jesus (John 5:17). Paul affirms this also. "We know that in everything God works for good" (Romans 8:28).

This belief is against the view known as deism, which flourished in the eighteenth century. By that view God's relation to the world was limited to an initial act of creation and a final act of judgment. Meanwhile he remains wholly transcendent, being neither immanent in nature nor revealed in history or religious experience.[5] This deistic view has a certain majesty and it is the inspiration of Addison's celebrated hymn, *The Spacious Firmament on High.* But the full meaning of it is exhausted in the final sentence, "The hand that made us is divine." This omits the robust and continuing concern of God as Father for the world he created. It omits the Biblical awareness of God's sustained and sustaining

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[4] A young man, Lee Chrisman, from San Diego, reported to the writer that he was once an eyewitness to the departure of an armed forces dirigible. Of the hundred men who were holding it by ropes, two failed to let go at the given signal. One of them let go too late and fell to his death a short distance from the reporter. The other one hung on for "dear life" for what seemed like an hour, until he was rescued. Such an experience would help impress anyone with what it means to "depend from."

[5] See *deism* in Webster's Dictionary.

providence. God's more direct administration of the world is summed up in Clarke's definition by the phrase, "sustains and orders all."

In modern days we find a tendency to reduce God's control of the world by the concept of nature's laws. The world's rhythms of movement are noted and formulated as laws of nature. It is assumed that the law of gravity does certain things to planets and to teardrops. Such "laws," however, are only descriptions of nature's predictable and regular behavior. They do not explain this behavior. It has been well said, "Boyle's law does not *exert* pressure on gases. It only *describes* such pressure." In thinking of "laws" our minds play tricks on us. To *law* in the legislative sense we sneak in the meaning of *law* in the executive sense. Many people learn this distinction when they disregard the law which says, "Speed limit 30 m.p.h.," only to be taken under custody by the law in a patrol car. The laws of nature are the constancy of God. They are expressions of his integrity and dependability as a Father. From both a philosophical and a religious point of view it is important to remember that God "sustains and orders" the world.

Miracles Are God's Extraordinary Acts

This provides a basis for a better understanding of the matter of miracles. For many people miracles are not mere marvels. They are a problem. If we think of nature's laws as self-ordering regularities, then it is almost, if not altogether, unthinkable that there should be an interruption in that orderly and undeviating process by a power from the "outside." If any extraordinary event does occur, it is assumed that there is some hidden or higher "law" which would explain the novel happening.

Such an attitude is a strange blend of skepticism and

faith. There is skepticism that denies the possibility of novel occurrences. There is faith that everything happens according to law and that we have only to explore further to discover the law. Now, to be sure, many so-called wonders and miracles are later discovered to have occurred according to "natural" and "regular" causes. Many primitive superstitions about disease and weather have given way to clear understanding of nature's ways of working. Moreover, scientific research and procedures have had to go forward against opposition from prejudiced modes of thought. Magic and obscurantism have resisted experiment and exploration and yet they have had to give way to scientific discovery and understanding. Anyone living among primitive people soon learns how dangerous and frightening the world is with no conception of the natural order. The goblins will get you even if you do watch out. Everything happens by miracle. In such a world of caprice it is a blessing to think in terms of nature's orderliness.

There is no warrant, however, for going to the extreme of saying that miracles do not and cannot occur. That is contrary to the unpredictable sports and emergents which do occur. It is also unnecessary to regard nature's laws as having a cast-iron rigidity, if we regard them as descriptions of God's constancy. Laws are God's ordinary ways of working. It is highly significant that a high percentage of natural events are orderly and predictable. Only so could there be intelligence and even morality. Only so can God show himself as constant and dependable. But when we see God as himself the sustainer and administrator of the world, we have a viewpoint which gives meaning also to extraordinary occurrences. They too can be seen as benevolent acts of God as Father. His love is not bound.

God and Man

The climax of God's fatherhood is in the creation of man. According to Biblical belief, man's appearance was a later step in the creative acts of God. Man was created in God's image and after his likeness. He was given dominion over nature (Genesis 1:20). This gives occasion for a low and ordinary view of man as well as for a high and glorious view.

The Low Estate of Man

Man shares the common life of the rest of nature. His body is composed of and nurtured by physical and chemical elements in common with other organic life. His biological structure and functions have many similarities to the animal world. Like them he is born, grows, eats, exercises, reproduces, struggles against enemies, is subject to disease, suffers pain, and is appointed to die. He shares finitude with all creatures and lives out his life in time and space. In many ways he appears at a disadvantage in the world of nature. There are animals larger and stronger than he. Some animals and trees live longer than he. Birds are able to fly and sea creatures are able to live in water. From a spatial point of view he is almost negligible. It has been estimated that if all the men who ever lived on earth were thrown at one time into Lake Superior it would raise the lake level only two fifths of an inch. By such reflections the psalmist asked long ago:

"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
The moon and the stars, which thou hast established;
What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" (Psalm 8:3, 4).

To bring this mood up to date we can refer to the comments Theodore Roosevelt and William Beebe used to make to each other as they searched out the

spot of light-mist beyond the lower left-hand corner of the great square of Pegasus:

> That is the Spiral Galaxy of Andromeda.
> It is as large as our Milky Way.
> It is one of a hundred million galaxies.
> It is 750,000 light years away.
> It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun.

After an interval Colonel Roosevelt would grin and say, "Now I think we are small enough! Let's go to bed."[6]

Beyond these limitations of creatureliness and finitude, there is the low estate of man due to sin, which we shall consider in the next chapter.

The Dignity of Man

There is another side of the picture, however, in that man is marked by grandeur and may rightly be regarded as the climax of God's creative fatherhood. For one thing, all of creation is regarded by Christian belief as good, being so judged by God himself. Man lives in a body as do the animals. But the body is not regarded as evil or sinful. Such a despising of the body is due to Oriental dualism and is largely alien to the Bible. *Carnality* and *the flesh* are terms not referring to biological urges alone. They refer also to aspects of man's higher nature when they are out of harmony with God, as in the case of idolatry, sorcery, dissension, party spirit, and envy (Galatians 5:16-21). Man's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).

The high view of man is warranted chiefly by his being created in God's image and after his likeness. The image of God does not take away man's creatureliness. Man is not a little god, but he has something in his nature

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[6] William Beebe (ed.), *The Book of Naturalists* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), page 234.

which enables him to participate in the life of God. Some people regard man's intelligence and reason as the meaning of God's image. Certainly these are high endowments which represent a "jump" above the animal world in spite of similarities. They make possible language, philosophy, society, art, and culture and they have importance in man's religious life. But we need to look further for the image of God.

Some look for man's highest gift in his social relationships—in his sympathy, his ability to take the role of another and see things in imagination as from another's point of view. This likewise is a profound endowment which is closely related to the use of language and which is important in all social living and religious experience. But we need to look still further. The image or likeness of God in man gathers up all the resources and capacities of man's complex nature. But it centers in man's capacity to respond to God and to participate in his fellowship. It refers to man's capacity to discern the difference between right and wrong and to pronounce judgments upon his behavior. It refers also to the claim the right has upon him—the moral obligation to do it.

D. S. Cairns writes thus of this moral imperative:

> The moment we do detect the Good as between two alternative courses of action, something else becomes manifest in it, something shining and formidable. It becomes not simply higher and finer, it becomes "imperative." I know that I ought to do it. The Good in this sense is not simply something wiser, preferable, more beautiful, more desirable. It has a thread of steel in it, a quality of adamant. It is the only course open to me that is "right," and every other course is wrong.[7]

It is seen from this mode of thinking that the image of God in man refers to something beyond man. It is thus

[7] D. S. Cairns, *The Riddle of the World* (New York: Round Table Press 1938), page 100.

said that man is a creature who has his center of gravity outside of himself. It is hardly correct, therefore, to speak of man as having a spark of divinity within him, if that refers to a self-sufficiency in man's own nature. It is truer to the Biblical view to follow Augustine's thought: "Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they repose in thee."

Man's Original Sonship by Creation

Thus God is our Father who is in heaven. He is the Father of all men by virtue of creation. "He made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26). Men are therefore brothers to each other in this original and generic sense. They are brothers by biological kinship from the day of their common creation. They may differ widely as individuals and as types but they bear the common image of God at the center of their nature. No amount of argument or quarreling can "unbrother" them. They contend and quarrel as brothers and all wars are fratricidal. No amount of enslavement or of spurious racism can disclaim this basic fact. The human race is one. This brotherhood of men is based on the fatherhood of God as their common creator. There have been few times in history when this has been more vigorously denied than in our own day. There has never been a time when it is more important to affirm it than now.

Man's Qualitative Sonship by Growth

The love of God our Father is, however, not only creative of life. It is also exacting of growth. Creation is only the beginning of man's life as procreation is only the beginning of a child's life in a human family. Cherished and precious as are such potentialities, they find their

fulfillment only in the process of development and growth. Full fatherhood and full sonship are attained when the son shares the father's aspirations, intentions, and standards of life; when the son responds to the father's will and participates in the father's fellowship and in the life of the family. This kind of sonship and brotherhood is qualitative, responsible, and achieved. It is based upon the sonship and brotherhood of creation but it goes beyond it. Men are created of one blood "to live on all the face of the earth" so that "they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him" (Acts 17:26, 27).

The ultimate standard of a son's growth and development is mature manhood according "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The ultimate standard for the growth of brotherhood is each part working properly, upbuilt in love until we "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Ephesians 4:13-15). Between that original sonship and this brotherhood of full qualitative response and participation there lies the long and sad gap of waywardness and sin. This will lead us to consider other aspects of God's loving fatherhood and other aspects of man's nature and condition. It will give us also a fuller view of the deep need for the redemption which, as we have already noted, stems from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Augustine's succinct phrase, God, "who made, remade us."

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Goodness and Severity of God

THE DEFINITIVE CHARACTERISTIC OF GOD, ACCORDING TO Christian belief, is love. This element in his nature was clearly implied in the last chapter, on the fatherhood of God. It will be more fully considered in the next chapter. The Bible does not stop at a mere qualification saying that God is lovelike or loving. It goes on to the substantive equation saying, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Love is the very nature of God's being. We must always remember this about the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. If this is omitted we miss the essence of God's character. We could pile up other long attributes one upon another but all of them together would not designate God accurately. We may ascribe to God omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence; or immanence, transcendence, and immutability; but if he be not love, it is not God as revealed by Jesus Christ the Son. Whatever else we say about God, it must be related to his love. He is our loving heavenly Father.

THE SEVERER SIDE OF GOD

But there is another side of his nature, a side which is severe and majestic, rigorous, and not to be mocked. Our forefathers were perhaps more familiar with this aspect of God's nature than we are. They dwelt upon it often and many people have considered their picture of God as forbidding, perilous, and indeed untrue to Christ's revelation of the Father. But this severity was a constant

and inherent characteristic in their thought about God. This was not because they were men of the frontier who lived in a hardy manner. It was not because they were less fastidious than we are. It was because they were familiar with the Bible and took seriously the full picture of God's nature.

As indicated in the last chapter, God is a father who exercises authority and administers discipline. There are many ways this is indicated in the Old Testament. Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden and the gateway was barred by the flame of a sword. The wicked on the earth were destroyed by the flood. Plagues were visited on Egypt for the oppression of Israel and upon wayward Israel for their unbelief in the wilderness. God was a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation. When the kingdom of Israel was established the prophets urged the people always to be faithful to the covenant made at Sinai. The kings and the people were warned of the doom which awaited them for their faithlessness. Their special favor from God would not protect them. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). Like a relentless, inescapable word of doom, the prophecies of Amos were fulfilled on Samaria and the pronouncements of Jeremiah came to pass in Jerusalem. This perilous prospect of destruction was set forth as the judgment of God upon his people—especially upon his favored people.

This View Runs Through the Bible

There are many who argue that this is only the Old Testament view of God, whereas in the New Testament we have a different picture. It is argued that the prophets

saw God erroneously as a God primarily of judgment and severity, whereas Jesus came to reveal God primarily as a loving father who did not have these severe characteristics.

This is to overlook many aspects of Jesus' teaching and of the New Testament record. A few familiar instances can serve to disabuse our minds of this one-sided view of Jesus and of his teaching. "If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15; see also Mark 11:25). "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28; see also Luke 12:5). "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" (Matthew 23:13ff.; see also Luke 11:52). "And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Matthew 25:30; see also Luke 13:28). "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41; see also Mark 9:42-48). As severe a word as Jesus ever spoke was his warning about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3:29). The severity of God is set forth by Paul in the celebrated "law of the harvest": "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). It is reflected in Hebrews 10:31: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

The Holiness of God

These random references call attention to a quality of God's nature which may be summed up in the familiar word *holy*. God is a holy God. His love is holy love. He is the holy one of Israel. The ark of his presence was a

holy ark. It was placed in the holy of holies in the tabernacle. The mountain where he was worshiped was a holy mountain. Jerusalem became the holy city. The classic address to God is "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty" (Revelation 4:8). Our bodies are holy because they are temples of God. Jesus prayed to God as "Holy Father." The Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit. In all these usages two conceptions are interwoven. One is awesomeness. The other is righteousness.

Holiness As Awe-fullness and Mystery

The concept of awesomeness is expressed in many familiar words in the vocabulary of religion. There are the more shocking words like *frightful* or *terrible,* and the ideas of God as the Perilous Other or as Wholly Other. These ideas are exemplified in the Bible by the death of Uzziah when he touched the ark to steady it (2 Samuel 6:6, 7) and by the psalmist's phrase, "He utters his voice, the earth melts" (46:6). There are less shocking but equally awesome words like *reverence, fearful, majesty,* and *mystery.* These are exemplified in the Bible by Isaiah's experience in the temple when he saw the Lord high and lifted up (Isaiah 6:1-5). The same mood is expressed in his view of God's difference from man: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). These two aspects are put together in Rudolf Otto's conception of the holy as a mystery at once humbling and attractive, awe-inspiring and uplifting. He calls this sense of sacred presence *mysterium tremendum et fascinans.*

A good Biblical instance is the experience of Moses at the burning bush. He was fascinated by it and said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush

is not burnt." He was also awe-struck and stayed by the voice which said, "Do not come near: put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." Then Moses hid his face, being afraid to look at God (Exodus 3:1-6).

Something of this background is retained in the New Testament respect for God's holiness and for the awesome majesty of the gospel. "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3). "For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest. . . . But you have come . . . to the city of the living God . . . to a judge who is God of all . . . and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant" (Hebrews 12:18, 22-24). The comforting drama of Revelation, with all its personal assurances, is set within the sweep of this same majesty of God. The worshiping heart of man discerns that God's presence is awesome indeed and that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Holiness As Righteousness and Goodness

God is also holy in the sense of righteousness. Without losing any of the sense of mystery and awe, the holiness of God is increasingly ethicized. In Abraham's time it was clearly affirmed. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25). The psalmist echoed this note: "The ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether" (Psalm 19:9). The prophets lifted up this quality of God and laid its claim upon God's people. "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

John the Baptist introduced the ministry of Jesus with the same claim of righteousness and call to repentance. On this characteristic of God's nature Jesus based his rigorous call to righteous living. Only so could men come under God's rule. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). This demand for righteousness grows out of the goodness of God. He alone is absolutely good and yet he desires that his children also become good. His righteous will for them is not for the sake of arbitrary obedience but for their good. As they obey him and fulfill his requirements they find the fulfillment of their own highest good. Jesus pronounced rich blessings on those who sought to do God's righteous will. They shall be satisfied and shall see God. They shall be called sons of God and shall belong to God's own kingdom. This is the positive side of God's goodness, but there is also an obverse side.

Holiness and Wrath

God is also severe with those who disobey and fall short of his goodness (Romans 11:22). The word often used to express this severity is *wrath.* This appears frequently in the Old Testament but also occasionally in the New Testament—chiefly in Revelation and in Romans. It is echoed also in a reported statement from Jesus: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him" (John 3:36).

This idea of wrath is disturbing to many people and they sometimes disregard it or deny it altogether, as incompatible with God's character. This is due to misconceptions which should be clarified. God's wrath is

not the kind of uncontrolled rage which many of us indulge in when we are angry. It is rather the structure of his moral integrity. It is his severe discountenancing of evil and sin. The holiness of the living God cannot brook evil. He moves actively against it and seeks to root it out and overcome it. This is not because he is petulant and easily offended but because he desires goodness in his children and in his world. His wrath is a quality of his goodness and of his love. It is the measure of his serious concern for righteousness. "Note then the kindness and the severity of God" (Romans 11:22).

We have had a glimpse of the more rugged and hardy aspects of God's nature. We have now to consider the darker aspects of the human situation. These are considered together in the same chapter because they are logical counterparts of each other. God's severity and judgment are expressed against the evil and sin in the world. Evil and sin in the world are the facts of our experience in connection with which we encounter God's severity and judgment. This simple logic leaves us, however, with deep perplexities and aspects of Christian belief which we shall have to explore further. These are the problems of suffering and the nature and results of sin.

The Problem of Suffering

The problem of suffering is both a practical and a theological problem. From a practical viewpoint it centers in the question: "Why do good people suffer?" People are baffled and disturbed by the inequities in life. A drunken driver runs suddenly across the center line of the highway and plows headlong into a car with two ministers returning home from a communion service. The drunken driver comes out with a sprained ankle and some bruises. One of the ministers is killed and the other one spends weeks

in the hospital with a brain concussion and a broken jaw. The world is full of pain and suffering. In glaring instances the faithful ones suffer acutely and the guilty or evil ones are spared. Often of equally good people one is taken and the other one is left. Disasters appear to strike the evil and the good indiscriminately, whether in the case of the bridge of San Luis Rey, the sinking of the *Titanic,* or the explosion of an airplane on the Colorado skyway. From a practical point of view men are weighed down by the poignant burden of suffering—whether from natural disasters like earthquakes, hurricanes, or floods; from the manifold pains of sickness and incurable disease; or from "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."

A Problem for Theology

In the field of theology this is called the problem of evil. It grows out of the fact of suffering but it is set by our beliefs about God. We believe he is "God the Father Almighty" and that he "creates, sustains, and orders all." We also believe that he is "our Father who art in heaven" and that he is "perfectly good" and "absolute love." The theological problem is: How can God, who is both almighty and all-loving, permit evil and suffering in his world? If he is almighty and still permits suffering, it would appear that his love is less than perfect. If he is all-loving and permits suffering, it would appear that his power is limited and that he struggles as best he can against great odds.

Theological and religious literature is full of "theodicies," of efforts to justify the ways of God to men. Many attempts to solve the problem of evil do it by minimizing one or the other of the three elements in it: the fact of suffering, the love of God, or the power of God.

The fact of suffering is minimized by Hindu

philosophers, who say that all sense experience in the world is *maya* or illusion. This philosophy is current in America in the view of Christian Science. Suffering and death are not real, it is argued; they are illusions due to the error of mortal mind. Popular "pollyannaism" is a similar attempt to ease the problem by minimizing the pain. Such an outlook provides a good cure for imaginary ills and it may often reduce the whining about actual pain. But it does not deal adequately with the real suffering of men. Nor does it give a satisfactory answer to the question: Why should man be beset by the illusions of mortal mind?

The love of God is minimized by unduly exalting God's absolute omnipotence and sovereignty. This marks the Moslem mode of thought about Allah. Everything that happens is viewed as the decree of Allah. His decrees are absolute and may indeed be arbitrary. It is the believer's business to submit and this religion of submission is therefore called Islam. Attempts to exalt God's sovereign decrees unduly or to regard him as beyond good and evil err in this same manner. They deal with the problem of evil by arbitrarily ruling out any questionings about God's providence. To be sure, surrender to the will and the appointments of God brings great religious comfort to those who suffer. But it is quite as much a trust in his love as it is a submission to his power.

The power of God is minimized by various forms of dualism. According to ancient Persian dualism there were two ultimate cosmic forces which were equal. Ahura Mazda was the power of light and Angra Mainyu was the power of darkness. They were regarded as in eternal struggle with each other. Such a view takes evil and the moral struggle with due seriousness, but its belief in an uncreated being coequal with God is alien to the Christian faith.

Satan and Suffering

In the Bible there is a similar struggle on between God and the Adversary, who is called by such various names as Satan (Mark 1:13), the devil (Luke 4:2), or Beelzebul (Luke 11:15-19). The Biblical view differs, however, from ancient and modern dualism in several ways. The evil force is a personal will set against God and his children in proud rebellion, sly deceit, or wanton destruction. He is not a mere impersonal resistance to God or a mere evil principle in the world. This personal evil force works against God in the inner life of men as well as in the accumulated errors and prejudices of society. This personal evil force is a created being and not co-equal with God. The Biblical material about the devil is not primarily philosophical but it is centered on the decisive victory Jesus Christ won against him. It is concerned with the resources of grace which are available to deal with his deceitful wiles and his fiery darts.[1]

God's almighty power is limited in some current modes of thought. A noted example is Professor Brightman's philosophy of a finite God. In his emphasis upon God as a personal being, he also argues that God does not have absolute power. In God's inner nature there is a "given," an element of inertia or resistance to be overcome as he seeks to exercise his benevolent will.[2] Such personalism rightly stresses the tenderness and mercy of God but omits the note of God's absolute power. This is a serious omission both for philosophy and for religious faith, because it views God as less than ultimate.

These and other attempts to solve the theological problem of suffering leave disturbing questions in the

[1] See William Robinson's *The Devil and God* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1945) for a clarifying discussion of this matter.

[2] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *The Problem of God* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1930).

mind. It has been frequently and rightly said, therefore, that Christian belief does not offer a neat intellectual answer to it. What is offered is a religious answer, a faith which enables one to work against evil, reduce suffering, and endure hardship as a good soldier. The Bible gives no neat answers to the mind but it reveals God's kingdom as present in the healing of the sick and in ministering to those in need. "My Father is working still," said Jesus, "and I am working" (John 5:17).

Helpful Considerations

There are, of course, some considerations which make the problem of suffering less baffling to the believer's mind. It helps to note that suffering is inherent in sensitivity. The risk of pain is involved in the sensitivity to pleasure and delight. The higher the capacity for joy, the greater the possibility of anguish. One wise man echoed our real mood when he declared, "I would rather be a man in pain than a cabbage in ecstasy." A doctor dealing with leprosy has reported that fingers and toes are not lost from the disease itself. They are lost because of injuries and infection which occur when the disease deadens the nerves in the hands or feet. The patient is deprived of the protection of pain!

It helps to note that suffering is inherent in order. The "laws" of nature are "working" all the time in a dependable and orderly manner. This is not a capricious universe. Gravity may pull a bricklayer to the sidewalk when he is overbalanced. But gravity holds the wall in position. Without this stability boats would not float, and we could not walk on the ground. By and large it works out well for God's children. This order is not an impersonal but an impartial order which is an expression of God's own integrity and dependability. Indeed, such

impartiality is the expression of God's perfect love and the standard for our own conduct. "Love your enemies," said Jesus, "and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:44, 45).

It helps to note that suffering is involved in social solidarity. There was an earlier time when this was clear and taken for granted. If a man committed murder, any member of his family was blood-guilty. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:2). Primitive tribes to this day have a strong sense of family and tribal solidarity in their court procedures. We have progressed to a keener sense of individual responsibility. We have learned the grim meaning of the private burden each must carry for himself. "The soul that sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4b). But modern transportation makes all the nations of the world vulnerable to one another's diseases, as we learned in the influenza epidemic of 1918. World tensions and world wars are the illnesses of world community. This is inherent in all community and the more intimate the brotherhood the greater the risk of pain. "If one member suffers, all suffer together" (1 Corinthians 12:26).[3]

It helps to note that suffering is essential for discipline and growth. We may not wish it so. We may not prefer that trials make us strong. We may think we would like to make a world with equable climate, free from weeds, where bread could be eaten without sweat on the brow.

[3] It is in terms of social solidarity that we can understand Paul's statement, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." "Adamic sin" need not imply that each of us is guilty for Adam's sin. It does imply that each of us inherits his human nature from the first man, Adam. It implies that each of us grows up in a distorted and sinful culture. It implies that each of us at the age of accountability falls, like Adam, from innocence to the knowledge of good and evil.

But we know better. We know that that would produce a race of jellyfish, of placid and contented cows. In our more responsible moments we see that the severity of God is part of the goodness of God.

It helps to note that suffering is involved in freedom. God has created us free to choose, free to take responsibility. To be sure, our freedom is not absolute or complete. We cannot by choosing add one cubit to our stature. We do not choose our parents or the century we are born in, or the mother tongue we learn. Our freedom is limited by our native endowments, by our environment, and by our former choices. But we are really free. We know we are free by the experience of making choices. Indeed, freedom is essential for developing moral character and for the exercise of love. But such freedom involves the possibility of making wrong choices and of resistance against goodness and love. In this real freedom lies real risk of error and of suffering. To ask why we cannot have freedom without this risk is like asking why we cannot have a circle with corners.

It helps, finally, to note that the suffering of good people often works out for the good of others. Thus, Joseph said to his brothers, who had sold him into Egyptian slavery, "Do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:5). Thus Paul declares: "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Thus Isaiah foresaw the results of the suffering of God's Servant. "With his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). Thus "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). This is the vicarious principle wherein suffering is taken on out of love for others and issues in their good.

It is the Christian gospel and it is God's triumphant way of dealing with the problem of suffering.

The Nature and Results of Sin

We have been looking at the fact and the problem of suffering as a counterpart to the goodness and severity of God. A closely allied issue is the fact and the problem of sin. Both suffering and sin are regarded as evil. They both are practical burdens to men and they both require clarification in our Christian belief. Sin is often regarded as moral evil because it is closely related to personal choices and to the development of moral character. The doctrine of sin is therefore important in Christian belief.

The Fact of Sin

Sin is taken as a serious fact. There has been a tendency in some circles to minimize the fact of sin. Man's major difficulty has been regarded as ignorance, immaturity, poverty, cultural lag, or maladjustment. His natural condition has been regarded as encouraging and hopeful. His predicament has been misjudged. He is like the mouse which encountered an elephant. When the elephant looked disdainfully down his trunk and asked, "Why are you so small? Why aren't you as big and strong as I am?" the mouse replied in squeaky understatement, "I've been sick."

But the Bible takes a darker view of man's natural situation. Sin is regarded as a widespread, deep-seated, and persistent fact. Something is centrally and terribly awry in man's nature which requires outside help to set it straight. In recent thought this Biblical view is more clearly confirmed in man's experience. If we look through a moral telescope we see great wrongs like exploitation, mistrust, insecurity, and war. If we look through a moral

microscope we see jealousy, anger, pride, and lust. The psychologists and the teachers have joined the prophets and the preachers to help make clear the terrible fact of sin. In our moments of insight we know it of ourselves. We can say with Paul, "For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . I can will what is right, but I cannot do it" (Romans 7:16, 18).

Sin Is Primarily Against God

We cannot equate sin exactly with crime. Crime is a violation of statute law and it may or may not be a sin. When the statute law is itself contrary to the will of God, we must obey God rather than man. Sin and misconduct are different, for misconduct is a violation of social convention. Such experience is terrifying enough, as we all know from our most embarrassing moments. Sin is usually conceived of as some form of lawlessness, as a violation of some standard of behavior.

It may be a violation of the law of one's own well-being. If we think of our own nature as self-existent, then such violation is a vice or merely "letting oneself down." But if we recognize the image of God in our nature, then we see that violation of the law of our being is a sin against God. Thus Paul pleads for clean living on a high religious level. "The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord. . . . Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?" (1 Corinthians 6:13, 15).

The lawlessness may be a violation of the law of fellowship or the law of love. Sin in this sense is primarily selfishness or self-centeredness. It is an attempt to isolate the self and wall it off from personal relationships. This is rightly seen as a widespread malady in modern life. Men seek their own selfish ends and deprive

themselves of the larger life for which they are made. This is sad enough when seen as anti-social conduct or when seen in terms of the pathology of personality due to isolation and rejection. It is more sad still and more true to fact when we see it as isolation from God. "Thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they repose in thee." Sin against fellowship and sin against God are intertwined in the Bible. "For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). But the fact that we are children of a common Father makes the sin against the brother a deeper wrong.

The lawlessness may be regarded as against the moral law. But here again we can see that its worst feature is that it violates God's own will. Thus it has been well stated in the *Westminster Catechism:* "Sin is any transgression of or any want of conformity to the will of God." *Sin* is a theological word which indicates the divine dimension of man's predicament. Sin is primarily against God.

Sin Involves the Total Personality of Man

It involves both the conscious and the unconscious areas of a man's life. There is a view which speaks only of known sin. In some ways what people do consciously is rightly regarded as their truest behavior. It is better if good. It is worse if evil. But the Bible long ago voiced the discerning prayers, "Clear thou me from hidden faults" (Psalm 19:12) and "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalm 51:10). Modern psychology has discovered afresh the unified nature of the conscious and the unconscious levels of personality. Both are involved in sin.

Sin involves both the private and the social aspects of our behavior. We are perhaps clear enough on the private

aspect of sin. "Not my brother, nor my sister, but it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer!" "I am a man of unclean lips." We need to see more clearly, however, our participation in the social dimension of sin. "I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5).

Sin involves both the motive and the act. Jesus did more than anyone else to push the problem of sin back into the intents of the heart. By his discerning teaching, anger becomes murder and the lustful look becomes adultery (Matthew 5:21-30). Christian belief is accordingly persistently concerned with the inner springs of action. Here is where the conflict centers. "For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Romans 7:15). Here is also where the power of the gospel applies. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2).

Jesus did more than anyone else to lift up the importance of the overt act also. "You will know them by their fruits. . . . Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:16, 21).

Jesus' emphasis on action applies equally to failure to act. Sins of omission are vividly warned against in the parables of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), and the last judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). It is the responsibility of the Christian minister to preach an "omissionary" sermon every so often! According to Christian belief there is a strong bond of unity in our behavior tying together the desires of the heart, the intentions of the will, the statements of the mouth, and the deeds of the hands. All are integrally involved in sin. Sin involves the total personality of man;

both the conscious and the unconscious areas; both the private and the social aspects; both the motive and the act.

Sin and Sins

Emphasis is therefore placed upon sin as a unified principle of personality and upon sins as varied and specific expressions of this central principle. To emphasize either sin or sins to the exclusion of the other is to miss the full significance of man's predicament. It is to miss also the nature and the glory of his salvation.

The Bible is concerned with specific sins. "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). "Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). Christian morality has always been concerned with codes of behavior which involve daily deeds and a way of life. In dealing with these deeds various groupings and catalogs of sins are made. They imply overt acts on the one hand and point, on the other hand, to the springs of action. This is seen in the typical list just mentioned from Galatians. It is seen also in the classical list of the seven root sins: pride, envy, anger, sloth, covetousness, gluttony, and lust.[4] These root sins are, in turn, sometimes subdivided into interrelated groupings of

[4] See Noel Hall, *The Seven Root Sins* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), *passim*. These seven are grouped still further. Three of them (sloth, gluttony, and lust) are regarded as sensual sins and are equated with "the lust of the flesh" in 1 John 2:16 and with "good for food" in Genesis 3:6. The first three (pride, envy, and anger) are regarded as spiritual sins and are equated with "the pride of life" and "to make one wise" in 1 John and Genesis. The remaining one (covetousness) is regarded as a mixture on the border of sensual and spiritual sin and is equated with "the lust of the eyes" and "a delight to the eyes" in the Scripture references.

spiritual and sensual sins. Such division reflects the combination of pride and bodily appetites as dominant motifs in the Biblical story of man's early sin (Genesis 3:1-10).[5]

The Bible also points, however, to the thought of sin as a central principle of wrongness at the heart of man, out of which are the issues of life. Sin is a problem at the center of the self, not merely of specific external acts. Tinkering with these acts is ineffective unless and until the heart is changed. This is why Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

This is the truth in the otherwise exaggerated doctrine of total depravity. It should not be taken to mean that every element or level of personality is absolutely evil or corrupt. It should not be accepted as meaning that the image of God is eliminated by sin. But there is truth in the belief that the image of God is distorted at the center by sin. There is truth in the belief that every level of personality is tinctured by sin. There is no such thing as a little garlic in butter. There is truth in the belief that a man is completely unable by his own unaided efforts to deal with his self-centeredness, which is the heart of his sin. This is the grim and realistic condition of man according to Christian belief. It is seen as the counterpart of God's goodness and severity. It can be conceded freely and with open eyes because the gospel is offered as a remedy for precisely this dark malady. "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are always more ready to discern and acknowledge our need when help is at hand to meet it.

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[5] It reflects also the classical motivations to sin—*superba* and *concupiscentia*—as well as two major desire drives of depth psychology: self-assertion and sex.

The Results of Sin Are Serious and Severe

Sin's results were already given some preliminary consideration in connection with the atonement. They have been foreshadowed further in the present chapter. A brief listing here will suffice.

One result is suffering. "The way of the faithless is their ruin" (Proverbs 13:15). A large measure of the pain and suffering in the world is the result of man's sinning. This is the law of the harvest (Galatians 6:7). While it is not true that a given person's suffering is due to his own precise sins, it is true that a cumulative result of sin is suffering.[6]

Another result of sin is moral weakness. After one experience of sin it becomes easier to repeat it and harder to refrain from it. One who fails to get up when the alarm clock rings soon reaches the point where he cannot hear it ring at all.

Guilt is another result. This is an objective fact, for the individual becomes blameworthy whether he acknowledges it or not. But it is also a widespread and poignant fact of subjective experience. The problem of felt guilt—whether dimly or sharply felt—is an almost universal human problem.

A further result is alienation. Inasmuch as man is made for fellowship with God and as sin is primarily against God, there results from sin a deep-seated estrangement from God. This estrangement shows up in the form of tensions and contradictions in man's own personality as well as in the form of divisions and conflicts between a man and his fellows in modern society. There are confusion and discord in the whole orchestra because the players take their eyes off the conductor. The whole

[6] See Jesus' comment on the "eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them" (Luke 13:1-5).

gamut of sin's results in man may be summed up in the word *bondage*—bondage to sin and to the snares of the devil. Such a view is not a mere bit of primitive imagery but a profound interpretation of the spiritual nature of sin, of the whole tangled snare we get caught in by our sin, and of the power beyond ourselves in whose clutches we are bound.

The ultimate framework within which the results of sin are seen in their true perspective is the goodness and severity of God. By the side of God's own goodness and righteousness man's sin appears all the more wrong. The results of sin are to be seen as God's severe judgment upon it. This judgment is severe because God is constitutionally unable to countenance sin and because he is intensely in earnest in his demand for righteousness.

CHAPTER EIGHT

In This Is Love

THE FOCUS AND ILLUMINATING CENTER OF GOD'S LOVE IS IN the coming of Christ into the world. This glowing fact shines on every page of the New Testament and comes occasionally to explicit statement. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). This bold theological proposition is athrob with the full power and appeal of the gospel. It is preceded and followed by these parallel statements: "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (3:16), and "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (4:11). In the glorious light of these affirmations we can explore more fully the meaning of the love of God the Father. As we focus on this definitive center we cannot disregard aspects of God's nature and purpose which we have already outlined. They are not canceled out or abrogated but remain as the framework and background of our present discussion.

KINDS OF LOVE

As we seek to discover the meaning of Christian love, it is well to note various kinds of love. In English we use the same word whether we are saying that we love potato salad or that we love God. The Greeks had several words for love.[1] Although they did not use them with the

[1] See Alan Richardson (ed.), *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), pages 131-136.

precision and the consistent distinctions which later scheme makers might wish to ascribe to these words, they each carried a primary emphasis worth noting.

The word *eros* refers to the love a man and a woman have for each other. It is marked by the desire to possess and enjoy the object of love. (Plato used it in spiritualized form for the upward quest of the soul toward the divine, but even here its quality is still acquisitive.)

This love of man and woman for each other can be distorted into lust. But this is rightly recognized as the prostitution or misuse of a power and capacity meant for higher ends. It can be distorted into romantic sentiment, as is the case with much popular entertainment. This has been aptly called "cardiac-respiratory love" because it centers in the flutterings of the heart and the catching of the breath. *Eros* love should be seen as God's great gift to men for the enrichment of personality by the bonds of intimate union; for the propagation and nurture of God's children in family life; and for the quickening of all levels of human capacity. Love as *eros* is of God.

A second kind is *philia,* the love of a man for his neighbor. Related words are *philadelphia,* love between brothers, sisters; and *philanthropia,* humanity or kindness. This level of love is less possessive or exclusive than *eros,* and less related to physical desire. It refers to the mutuality which is the basis of friendship and brotherhood and the foundation of common life. It is defined by the golden rule but it can be distorted into selfish agreements —"You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours." It can also be lifted to high levels of mutuality and ordered justice. It can be debased into a narrow tribalism and thus become a barrier to the wider world community— "God bless me and my wife; my son John and his wife; us four and no more." The Greek word *storgé* referred

especially to family affection. *Philia* or neighbor love is also of God and it is enjoined in the second great commandment: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31).

In the New Testament a new word was used for Christian love: *agapé*. It was a Greek word formerly with less color and less sharp definition than either *eros* or *philia*. Into its former neutrality the Christians poured all the wealth of meaning which Christ had shown them of divine love. "By this we know love [*agapé*], that he laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16). "In this is love [*agapé*]; not that we loved God but that he loved us" (4:10). This divine love is free and spontaneous. It is not a sentiment evoked primarily by the winsome qualities of the loved one. It is rather the free overflowing desire of the loving one to bestow affection and benefits on the loved one. It is universal love which is concerned with all men, sending rain and sunshine upon the just and the unjust, and reaching out in love to friends and to enemies as well.

Recent theological literature has discovered afresh what is implicit in the events and the very vocabulary of the New Testament. A new kind of love was disclosed in the advent of Christ and this is the disclosure of the nature of God. "In this is love." "God is love." "Love is of God." It is *agapé* love which marks God as our Father. It is expressed in his creation of the world and of man. It is expressed in his providential administration of the natural and moral orders. It is expressed in his severity and holiness by which he requires righteousness and exercises judgment against sin. These aspects of God's nature and fatherhood are outlined for us in the Old Testament and form the background of the fuller and definitive view of God and his love in the New Testament.

In the light of his work of redemption in Christ we can see that God's love is indeed a "many-splendored" thing.

Marks of God's Love

God's love as it has been revealed to man and apprehended by him down through the centuries shows many well-defined characteristics. It is to some of these that we now give attention.

God's Love Is a Pursuant Love

One distinctive feature of God portrayed in the Bible, as we have already seen, is his initiative. He is not a passive being waiting for men to seek him out. He is the great intruder and aggressor who seeks men out—"Adam, where are you?" He is not a low-pressure center drawing breezes and fronts to where he is. He is a high-pressure center pushing his own front toward man. He causes disturbances and changes the weather as he presses ever in upon man. This is the picture we get from the psalmist (Psalm 139:7):

> "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
> Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?"

This divine initiative can appear quite disconcerting indeed, as Job put it in a vivid figure (7:19):

> "How long wilt thou not look away from me,
> nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle?"

But it is also the ground of peace which passes understanding. "How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God!" (Psalm 139:17). It is the ground, as well, of God's immanence and relevance to the world. He is involved in the world not because of mechanical entanglement but because of his own outreaching love.

This conception of God's pursuing love was made vivid to us forever by the matchless parables of Jesus. In

Luke 15 we have three of them: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. In them all we can note the great concern for the lost one even though others are already in safekeeping. In the case of the son this is in a one-to-one proportion; for the coin it is in a one-to-nine proportion; for the sheep it is in a one-to-ninety-nine proportion. Special joy is manifest on earth and in heaven when such a lost one is found. In the case of the sheep and the coin there is aggressive pursuit until found. In the case of the son the pursuant love faces independence and freedom. It is shown, therefore, by the father's running out to welcome the returning prodigal and in the free and generous forgiveness and restoration he bestows upon him.

Another story, the parable of the vineyard, given in each of the synoptic gospels (Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-11; Luke 20:9, 16), is an expansion of a similar story in Isaiah (5:1-7) showing more patience and a more pursuant love. It also applies the parable to Israel's leaders and includes the crowning effort of the vineyard owner toward its redemption: "He had still one other, a beloved son; finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' . . . And they took him and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard" (Mark 12:6, 8). Here God's whole cumulative effort for the world's salvation is set forth. It was brought to costly climax in the mission of Jesus Christ. "For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). The New Testament writers were clear in the inference that this work of Christ stemmed from the pursuant love of God. God, who spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by a Son (Hebrews 1:1, 2). "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). "In this is love."

Francis Thompson's *The Hound of Heaven* is a literary classic on this same theme. A human soul has fled from God, hidden from him, evaded him.

> I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
> I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
> I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
> Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
> I hid from Him.

But "Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue." God pursues the soul through all the night and days, through tears and laughter, through evasions and disappointments until at last the soul learns that all it blindly sought is kept for it in God. "In this is love."

In all these pictures we see the initiative and inescapable outreach of God's love. We see it also as focused on his individual children. All Jesus had to teach about God's minute care gives particular focus to his fatherly love. The lost sheep, coin, and son (Luke 15); the sparrow's fall and the numbered hairs of our heads (Matthew 10:29, 30); the calling of the sheep by name (John 10:3); and the concern for the little ones (Matthew 18:6, 10, 14) and the least (Matthew 25:40, 45)—all of these statements of Jesus make overwhelmingly personal God's pursuant love and concern for his children.

God's Love Is a Persuading Love

God's pursuant love can be a frightening thing. It is especially so when focused on each individual person, as we have seen, and when it is seen as having behind it all the weight of God's might and inescapable purpose. The thrust of such pressure is infinitely greater than stepping up the ordinary air pressure of fifteen pounds per square inch to the one thousand one hundred twenty-six pounds of water pressure per square inch at the Kitimat power

plant in British Columbia![2] Many pictures of God's terrible sovereignty leave us in a crushing and sunken mood, whether we think of double and arbitrary predestination of some to eternal perdition and others to eternal bliss, or of God's inscrutable decrees, or of the gentler form of God's pursuant love outlined above.

There is another aspect of his character throughout the Bible. Even though Adam and Eve were driven from Eden, it was after a conversation in which Adam was allowed the honor of being addressable. Severe as the prophets were in their denunciations, they could also plead in God's name: "Come now, let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18). Even so strong a "Calvinist" as Paul can say, "How are they to hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14). Jesus' whole approach to men was through persuasion. "Come unto me" was his open invitation. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" was his constant refrain. He regarded the coercive pressures of signs and political power as temptations of Satan, as he pursued his messianic ministry. The most explicit instance of God's working by persuasion is implied in Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."

All the persistent weight of God's omnipotence and all the pressure of his pursuant love are halted at the threshold of human personality. God is not like a big bad wolf threatening to blow one's house in. He is a gentleman who stands with hat in hand awaiting a free answer from man. God works with men in a manner similar to the way Plato describes the work of an artist. An artist persuades his material, seeking to evoke beauty

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[2] See *National Geographic Magazine*, September 1956, page 378.

from his medium in terms of the character of the material. An artist must do this because he has not created the material. God, though he has created men, works by persuasion because of his love. It is the nature of love to confer freedom and to elicit a free response. God does not desire a bludgeoned and abject response from his children. What he desires most is the free response to his love, the free appreciation of his goodness, and the free choice of his will. It is the real nature of love and goodness, of holiness and truth to be discerned only in such an uncoerced relationship.

To be sure, God has many prior rights and lays on men his absolute claims. Moreover, he presumably has a thousand ways of running circles around us both by outward circumstance and by inward promptings. But these are exercises of his prevenient, or forehanded, grace and expressions of his persuasive love. God still respects freedom. Men often are reluctant to exercise their freedom. Rather than cherishing it they seek to evade its responsibilities. They desire to be governed by external authorities which will make their choices for them. They seek to avoid the perils of freedom by sliding into cozy routines and new forms of bondage. But God's love is such that he administers an order of freedom wherein alone men can grow into responsible sonship.

God's Love Is a Suffering Love

We can see clearly implied in the above discussion that God is, so to speak, vulnerable to man's rejection. If he grants man freedom and if his purpose is to work through persuasion we have the basis for a strain between what God is seeking in man and what man gives him in response. Our discussion of the atonement indicated that the sin of man aroused God's severity and wrath and also evoked his

sympathy and love. This is the divine counterpart of Calvary.

There are some elements in traditional Christian belief which oppose or minimize this view of God. Classical theology spoke much about God's "impassibility" —his being removed from the capacity for suffering. This was done on the basis of certain philosophical difficulties. But the plain implications of the Bible are strongly in its favor. There has been a more familiar tendency to minimize God's suffering love by drawing a sharp line between the function of God and of Christ in atonement theories. God is regarded as the righteous judge who is offended by man's sin and can only oppose it with his wrath. Christ is regarded as the one whose death on the cross gives satisfaction to God's righteousness and thus makes forgiveness possible.

That there is such tension, in the presence of sin, has already been made clear. But the tension does not lie primarily between the Father and the Son. It lies within the heart of the Father as we see it within the heart of the Son. In ways perhaps beyond our understanding but clearly discerned by our hearts, we see a great price paid for our redemption. Christ suffered on the cross and died for our sins. But in doing so he opened a window into the very heart of God. He went to Calvary in response to the redemptive will of God. He is the one "whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Romans 3:25). "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16).

The Relevance of Agape Love

It should be noted again that a special peril attaches to all discussion of relevance in religious and ethical matters. It is the peril that the problems we face become, in themselves, the standard of judgment. Our minds are drawn away from God as the ultimate object of devotion and away from his perfect will as the ultimate criterion of action.

Love Is Its Own Norm

If love suffers in the presence of sin, sin may be the occasion of the suffering but it does not "cause" the suffering. *Agapé* love is free and spontaneous. Those who espouse the way of *agapé* love because it "works" are then tempted to disavow it when it appears to fail. But in the nature of love, it loves on into suffering. Love goes to the uttermost in suffering and lasts on still. Love is forever. It does not seek to validate itself by its relevance. The ethic of love is not a calculated ethic. For that matter, no ethical system is purely utilitarian. There is always an honor code in the picture somewhere. This is clear enough when a pacifist refrains from fighting, because he is committed to the way of suffering love. It is also true when an army declares, "It is better to die fighting than to live on in slavery; better to die on our feet than to live on our knees." In both instances action is based ultimately on what is regarded as right rather than on what is relevant.

It is the peculiar merit of the Christian love ethic that it does not promise success. It goes ahead with its eyes open, anticipating persecution, suffering, and death. (One may note, in contrast, the peculiar deceptiveness of military power. It promises a success which it can never guarantee and which it seldom achieves.) *Agapé* love is noncalculating and self-giving. It mirrors the boundless

and free grace of God. Any consideration of its relevance is within the framework of God's prevenient grace. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). God's love has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We shall always be forgiven sinners and unprofitable servants.

God's *agapé* love does, however, have relevance to human behavior. This is clear throughout the New Testament. Jesus sets it up as the standard: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Paul's hymn to love is not merely for adoration but also for exhortation: "Make love your aim" (1 Corinthians 14:1). John sharpens the claim by explicit appeal. "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11).

Agapé Love and Other Virtues

There is a current tendency to draw such a sharp line between divine love and human love that the claim and the relevance of divine love are obscured and weakened. This may be due in part to the penetrating but somewhat one-sided study by Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros.* It is due in part to the easy way in which the Sermon on the Mount has been commended as a blueprint and guarantee of success in business and in politics. Some social-gospel thinking has made too easy an identification between given social programs and the kingdom of God. There has also been too easy an identification between ordinary mutuality and *agapé* love. A deepening critique was overdue and we should welcome its corrective strictures. But there is a subtle evasion of the claims of *agapé* love by calling it

an "impossible ideal"[3] or by drawing absolute distinctions between *agapé* and *eros* types of love. The same danger lies in the interpretation of "loving one's neighbor *as* oneself in terms of loving one's neighbor *instead of* oneself."[4]

The Bible does not follow sharp distinctions between human and divine love, but rather lays the claims of *agapé* upon men directly from the divine example. Loving of the enemy and impartial concern for the just and the unjust are enjoined in these words: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). "He laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). The parables of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) and the last judgment (Matthew 25:31-46) indicate that our faithful exercise of *agapé* love is a matter of eternal life and death.

Instead of making an absolute distinction between *agapé* love and other virtues, it is true to Christian belief to see how it should interfuse other virtues. In the case of the love of man and woman, *eros* love is not sufficient in itself. Marriage counselors frequently call attention to the frustrations involved when persons are inconsiderate of their partners in marriage relationships. It is at its best only when it is lifted to the level of *agapé* love. That does not eliminate its *eros* qualities but lifts them toward a sacramental level. Paul's exhortation is characteristic of the New Testament: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ

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[3] See Reinhold Niebuhr's *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper, 1935), chapter IV, "The Relevance of an Impossible Ethical Ideal." See also John H. Yoder's *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Pacifism,* a pamphlet published in Holland in 1954, the Heerwegen series.

[4] See Daniel Day Williams, *What Present-Day Theologians Are Thinking* (New York: Harper, 1952). Chapter III is an excellent review of this problem.

loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25).[5]

The same is true of the mutual love of a man for his neighbor. It is insufficient by itself, especially when under strain by insult or defection. That is precisely the point of 1 Corinthians 13. The strains of congregational life can be overcome only as *agapé* love becomes both the motive and the pattern of the members' lives together. The same is true among the Ephesians: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (4:32). Similarly *agapé* love and justice should not be unduly separated and set in contradiction to each other. This is done often in our thought about God. For analysis purposes we may distinguish them but they are one in God.

Justice should not be regarded as "love's strange work" or as a mere concession to sin whereby various egoisms may be balanced against each other.[6] Justice should be regarded as the structure of *agapé* love. Justice is not merely "preparatory for love"[7] but finds its fullness in love. Christ came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10). Justice is seen in unduly restricted terms, however, if it is only equal justice or even proportional justice. There is in the Bible what Paul Tillich calls transforming or creative justice.[8] This goes beyond a rigid concept of equalitarian justice and is flexible enough to deal with each individual need. It is

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[5] It is significant that in the Greek Paul uses the *agapé* verb for this marriage relationship.

[6] Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper, 1935), pages 140, 189.

[7] Nels Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God* (New York: Harper, 1951), page 227.

[8] *Love, Power, and Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), pages 64-66.

creative enough to forgive and to transform. Even in human affairs such flexibility is necessary and, rather than implying a breakdown of justice, it lifts justice to a high-minded level. In such ways *agapé* love is greatly relevant to human behavior and to other virtues.

The Triumph of Agape Love

The problem of universal salvation belongs properly to a later chapter. But it can be given logical consideration here. Belief in this doctrine stems from different premises: from a belief in universal and inherent goodness of all men; from a corporate and racial intepretation of the incarnation and the atonement; from cheaply sentimentalizing God's forgiving mercy; from exaggerating God's sovereignty without moral reference. A current form of the doctrine grows out of stress upon God's victorious love. It is a view of special appeal to those who believe in the way of suffering love as the way to deal with enemies and as the way of overcoming evil with good.[9] This view does not rule out punishment or the sufferings of hell. It stresses the reality of moral freedom and the need for repentance. But it argues that God's love is sovereign and has all eternity to work in. It argues that one permanently lost soul is the defeat of God's love, that heaven would not be heaven as long as hell remains. It argues that the problem of evil would not be solved without the total victory of God's love. It argues that the larger logic of God's love must lead one to this belief in universal salvation.

It must be admitted that this line of thought has a deep appeal to one's sympathy and Christian love. It appears clear also that God's own desire is for all men to be saved, "not wishing that any should perish, but that

[9] See H. H. Farmer, *God and Men* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1947), pages 168-177; see also Nels F. S. Ferré, *op. cit.*, chapter nine.

all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). In connection with God's shepherdlike love Jesus himself said, "It is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (Matthew 18:14). It is also clear that the concern of Calvary and of Christ's great missionary commission are for everyone—for the last, the least, and the lost. Anyone who in the name of God's righteousness takes pleasure in the punishment of the wicked has not understood the loving heart of God. The word of judgment is *Alas!* not *Aha!* Why not then subscribe eagerly to the belief in universal salvation?

Difficulties With Universalism

First, the Bible pictures constantly two ways of life and destiny. There is a wide difference between being saved and being lost. The difference is pictured variously as darkness against light, as folly against wisdom, as a broad way against a narrow way, as wickedness against righteousness, as death against life. No one is more explicit on these distinctions than Jesus himself. "And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:47, 48). "Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:45, 46).

Secondly, the Bible lays constant emphasis on the tremendous importance of what men do here and now in this world and on its implications for their destiny in the next. "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" is a characteristic of the New Testament mood (2 Corinthians 6:2). The critical nature

of decisions and of response to encounters and visitations is a recurrent emphasis from Abraham's entertaining angels unawares (Genesis 18:1-8) or Moses' response to the burning bush (Exodus 3) to the advent of Christ in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4) and to the rejection of Christ's overtures to Jerusalem. Crisis and destiny are gathered up in the concept of *kairos* time, the concept of God's visitations and appointments. Judgment is joyous or sad according to the outcome. "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes . . . because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:42, 44). This note of urgency and destiny is set forth in the law of the harvest: "Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

The consequences of this are especially critical in connection with the Holy Spirit. Rejection of his promptings is regarded by Jesus as blasphemy and as unforgivable because the power to repent is dulled (Mark 3:28-30). This is according to the law of habit and fixity of character which we all can observe. It may be hard to say when the point of no return is passed, but it is clear that the line moves toward permanence. The time comes when "it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened" (Hebrews 6:4). All this is set forth as a matter of grim fact and not as a psychological device to evoke action. All of the Biblical urgency is based on the assumption that our future destiny is fixed by our life in this world. The expectation of continued flexibility beyond death is speculative and has practically no warrant from the Bible or from experience.

Thirdly, the certainty of universal salvation goes beyond the implications of real freedom. This, of course, is somewhat recognized by those who espouse universal

salvation. But, as it has been well pointed out, there is a curious confusion between sovereign love and sovereign power when it is assumed that God's love will finally wear down the sinner and win him over. "It is the very nature of love to invite, not coerce." It is precisely the nature of love to respect real freedom to the very end.[10]

Finally, the doctrine of universal salvation is a speculative and short-cut solution to the problem of evil. Soper calls it a "premature" solution,[11] sidestepping the recurring words of Jesus about the broad road to destruction and the narrow road to life, about the many who are called and the few who are chosen. We saw earlier how complicated and baffling the problem of evil is. It is perplexing at the practical and the philosophical levels. It is a problem so great that Christians have always looked to God and to the world beyond for some basis of hope. For some this has been primarily in terms of justice and the vindication of righteousness. Many of these have accepted this view lightly or have regarded the punishment of the wicked with relish. But, it is equally hasty to assume the logical necessity of love's defeat if one person remains a problem child. Hordern points out that this "makes evil stronger than good"; it would give undue "power to one cantankerous sadist." We may continually hope for the victory of God's love. "But we have no reason for dogmatically insisting that it must come about or else the whole process has been a failure."[12] The problem of evil has no easy solution. We shall have to trust in the love

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[10] See David Wesley Soper, *Major Voices in American Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), page 91. Also, L. Harold DeWolf, *A Theology of the Living Church* (New York: Harper, 1953), page 286.

[11] *Op. cit.*, page 88.

[12] William Hordern, "The Theology of Nels Ferré," in *The Pastor* (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, February 1956), Volume XIX, page 12.

of God that his judgments are true and righteous altogether.

Meanwhile, we may accept this rule of thumb: "Always think of yourself as capable of falling into alienation from God, no matter how firm you feel in the faith; think of your neighbor as capable of eternal blessedness, no matter how depraved or indifferent he may seem. This does not dispel the perplexities that enshroud our final destiny, but it assumes an attitude that leads toward clear light."[13]

[13] Walter Marshall Horton, *Christian Theology* (New York: Harper, 1955), page 270.

CHAPTER NINE

The Fullness of the Godhead

THE TRINITARIAN CONCEPTION OF GOD IS DECLARED SIMPLY in the familiar hymn phrase: "God in three persons, blessed Trinity." More explicitly the idea is that the fullness of the Godhead is one in substance and threefold in persons. It is a conception tied up with great amounts of confusion and controversy which make it difficult to explore it on its theological and religious merits. Let us attempt, however, to understand its meaning at the time it was formulated (at Nicaea in 325 and at Constantinople in 381) and to see its significance for our own belief today. We shall have to do this in the face of various ways which people have of minimizing its importance.

Some people minimize its importance by saying that it is just a lot of abstruse terminology which we cannot understand. They echo Augustine, who said that we say "three persons" as a manner of speaking not adopted for its own sake but because it is better than saying nothing at all! Or they point out that the early theologians got unduly wrought up over a diphthong—over the difference between *homo* and *homoi*![1] To be sure, the literature on this matter originates in Greek and Latin and contains technical philosophical terms. It is not our purpose to explore the subtleties or to trace in detail the various

[1] We need only note the difference a vowel can make in critical instances such as this exchange of telegrams. "Did John recover?" It is a matter of life and death whether the answer is "John did" or "John died."

developments of definition and thought. It is, however, worth some effort to explore it.

Others regard trinitarian thought as an arbitrary dogma to be imposed on the Christian's belief by ecclesiastical or political authority. Unfortunately the Nicaean creed was used in that way. Those not subscribing to it were deposed from office, were excommunicated from the church, and had curses pronounced against them. The Emperor Constantine imposed exile as an added punishment from the political authority. Authoritative creeds are often misused in this way rather than used as instruments for clarifying true Christian belief. Creedal statements should be used for the latter purpose alone.

Some people discredit trinitarian thought by calling attention to the personal bickering and party contentions represented at Nicaea. Here again the picture is indeed gloomy. There was personal and official jealousy in Alexandria, where the problem arose. There was party contention at Nicaea and more still in the years which followed. Constantine called the conference at Nicaea not primarily to discover religious truth but to prevent disruption among churchmen from threatening disunity in his empire. The later councils which dealt with Christ's relation to God and with Christ's own nature were a sad series of party struggles and were a real betrayal of Christian attitudes. They dealt nevertheless with real problems of Christian belief. Such problems needed to be thought through then as they need to be thought through today. It appears that even in the midst of contention genuine Christian concern for true belief can assert itself, fundamental issues can be clarified, and significant affirmations can be set forth. It is a needless confusion of the issue to ascribe all such differences of opinion to a contentious spirit.

The Deity of Christ and the Unity of God

We should distinguish between a power struggle of parties and real problems of thought which become entangled with the struggle. Whether such problems are major factors in the struggle or whether they are merely an excuse for the struggle, they should be understood in their own terms. The real problem which disturbed the church in Alexandria and at Nicaea was the relationship between Jesus Christ and God. Two central affirmations of Christian belief seemed to contradict logical thought and posed a theological question. The one affirmation was that Jesus Christ is God. The other affirmation was that God is One. The theological problem is how we can think of God's unity in such a way that we can also think of Christ as himself essentially God.

Christ's Deity Is Affirmed

In earlier chapters we already noted how the man Christ Jesus came to be so highly regarded that he was believed to be also divine. As a man he was seen to be a humble carpenter of Nazareth; a meek and lowly teacher of deep religious truth; a compassionate healer of men; a stirring prophet of righteousness; a claimant messiah calling men to follow him; a suffering servant giving his life as a ransom for many. We saw how in expressing their estimate of his person the early Christians spoke of him variously as Messiah, Lamb of God, King of the Jews, Savior of the world, effulgence of God's glory, the express image of God's substance, and, more commonly, as Son of God and Lord. He was spoken of as Lord of the Sabbath, Lord of life, Lord of glory, Lord of lords. We saw how in calling him Lord the Christians were using the same title for him which had become the title for God himself, especially among the Jewish Christians. For Gentiles the

term *Lord* was familiar as the title for the divine heads of the mystery cults.[2] Jesus Christ became for them the true God and Savior. He was for them not merely a better Lord or the best Lord; he was the only Lord.

There are repeated references in the New Testament which set him in a position subordinate to the Father. It is all the more impressive that at any point he is explicitly given equal status with God. One instance is Thomas's address to the risen Christ: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Another instance is in Titus 2:13, which speaks of "the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." These references were based on the belief in the incarnation of God himself in the man Christ Jesus (John 1:14; Philippians 2:6, 7). "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9). So high a position did Christ command in men's allegiance and so important was his deity for their salvation that nothing less than essential deity was regarded as an adequate statement of his being. The Nicaean statement guarded vigorously against any essential subordination by such phrases as "of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father."[3] In our own day the same conviction is expressed in such phrases as "the deity of Christ," "Jesus Christ as divine Lord and Savior," and the specific affirmation required for membership in the World Council of Churches, "our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior."[4]

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[2] Arthur C. McGiffert, *The God of the Early Christians* (New York: Scribners, 1924), pages 41ff. It may be, as this volume argues, that many Gentile Christians were at first somewhat polytheistic and added Jesus Christ as supreme Lord of lords, only later to become more explicitly monotheistic. In any case it is clear that the term *Lord* meant the deity of Christ.

[3] Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1884), Volume II, page 58.

[4] W. A. Visser't Hooft (ed.), *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (New York: Harper, 1949), page 197.

God's Unity Is Affirmed

The other affirmation of Christian belief is the unity of God. One line of approach to this concept was philosophical. The world over, the minds of men have sought to discern behind the diverse phenomena of the world a basic principle of unity. This principle of unity is variously conceived of as the original source of all things, the basic ground of all things, the unifying center of all things, the ultimate end of all things, or the essence of all things. In polytheistic cultures, the religious philosophers sought for an absolute principle or a supreme being as the ultimate One. The craving for unity is in the human mind and the philosophers therefore seek for the Whole, the Universal, the Eternal, the Absolute, the Ultimate, the Infinite, the Supreme One. This was then and is today a persistent problem of philosophy. As classical philosophers were converted to the Christian faith, they brought with them both the tradition and the skill for continuing this concern for unity.

The other line of approach to the unity of God was more explicitly religious. It centered in the Old Testament writings with their passionate concern for monotheism. "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3) was the opening word of the Decalog. A long struggle against idolatry was carried on by the prophets. It was a struggle marked by fanaticism and excess of zeal (2 Kings 10; Hosea 1:4) but it ended in the complete elimination of idols among the Jews. The keynote of their worship was in the declaration of the first commandment, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

This passionate concern for God's unity was the heritage of early Christians from the Old Testament, from the temple in Jerusalem, and from the synagogues of the

Dispersion. The living God of the Christians was more than a philosophical principle. He was the great I AM. He was God the Father Almighty. Christian thought and Christian devotion began with him, centered in him, and ended in him.

The Holy Spirit's Deity Is Affirmed

Another conviction marked Christian belief—that the experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and at other times was an experience of God himself. This too was very God of very God. The problem produced by this belief was, however, no different from that produced by belief in the deity of Christ. The main discussion, therefore, centered on Christ's relationship to God. Once that was cleared up, the Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Trinity, fitted into the same formula. The problem thus was: How can we think of God in such a way as to maintain his undivided unity and also fit into his unity the fact of Christ as God; and the experience of the Holy Spirit as the experience of God himself.

The Framing of the Trinity

The formulation of trinitarian faith dealt with early Christian beliefs and attempted to clarify problems of thought implicit in those beliefs.

The Biblical Background

The materials for trinitarian belief were in the Bible. In the Old Testament, God was not conceived of as a static unity like a tranquil cosmic pool. He was a vivid personal being of intense activity. He was the living God who acted in creation. He acted as the energizer of his prophets upon whom his Spirit fell. He acted also as the helper, the savior, and the redeemer of his wayward

and unfaithful people. We have, therefore, a conception of unity and manifoldness in the being and the nature of God.

In the New Testament it was this God who visited his people in the person of his Son and who was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself. It was this God who made his presence felt in the Spirit on Pentecost. These were the Biblical materials for the trinitarian conception. The New Testament is not primarily a book of systematic theology or of philosophical wisdom. Its interest is primarily religious and redemptive. But within the New Testament there appears a clear basis for the trinitarian conception. This becomes explicit in the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." It is explicit also in the apostolic benediction, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:14).[5]

How Hold These Views Together?

Early Christian thought worked at the problem this created and sought to safeguard both poles of belief, as men's minds veered too far now one way and now another. There were views which quite clearly affirmed the deity of Christ but threatened the oneness of God. Hence there was misgiving when men spoke of a "second God," or when God was regarded as being successively of different modes. Sabellianism was such a modalism which regarded God as being Father in the Old Testament, Son during Christ's time on earth, and Holy Spirit since the Day of Pentecost. Such successiveness of modes was

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[5] See also 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:1, 2; and Jude 20, 21.

regarded as error because it divided up God's unity into parts. Other views sought to affirm God's unity but did so by regarding the Son and the Spirit as subordinate to the Father. Arianism was such a view, even though it gave the Son an exalted position—begotten before the ages of time, a perfect creature of God, but not as one of the created beings. The Nicaean Council was especially concerned to reject the view that "there was when he was not" and the view that he is of "another substance" from the Father or that he is "a creature" or that he is "changeable." All of these terms were rejected because they made the Son subordinate to the Father.

One Substance and Three Persons

In what terms then shall one think of God as at once unified and threefold? The formula used in the classic creeds was that God is one in substance and threefold in persons. Since God is infinite, these terms are, in the nature of the case, analogies.

Substance was a term taken from the Roman courts of law, where it referred to that in respect to which a man's status in the community is determined. A man of substance is a man of established position. It is closely related to essence and inner being. It is that which is essential to the man himself. In relation to God it refers to his absolute supremacy in the whole range of being. This is what makes God what he is.

When we say that God is threefold, reference is made to his activity and administration. Here the word *persona* was used. This was likewise a legal term referring to a party to a legal action. The party of the first part is called a person. This could be an individual or a corporation. It designates a specific function performed by a unit of responsibility and reference. A more familiar use of

person is in connection with drama, in which it is the exact equivalent of *role*. *Dramatis personae* are the roles to be performed. Sometimes one actor will play one role throughout the drama and sometimes he will play two or more roles, and then there are several *personae*. In the classical era these *personae* were identified with various masks worn by the actor. These masks were also called *personae*. This meaning of *person* thus is not a precise equivalent to our use of it today. It is not exactly a completely separated personality. To speak of God in such terms would have been regarded as tri-theism.

God's Varied Roles

The trinitarian formula was a way of thinking of the Godhead as one in three and three in one. God in his primary status is indivisibly one and he exercises his supremacy in three distinguishable roles as Father-Creator, Son-Redeemer, and Holy Spirit-Energizer. The roles are distinct but they are not "parts" of God; very God of very God is fulfilling each role. It is very similar to the way one man fulfills the roles of brother to his sister, husband to his wife, and father to his son. Each of these roles or relationships is distinct, and each is maintained simultaneously. Into each of them, also, the man puts himself in his essential being. None of the three would be satisfied with a subordinate part of him. So it is with the fullness of the Godhead.

The Significance of the Trinitarian Formula

If the trinitarian formula is to merit the respect of and employment by sincere seekers after the truth about God, it must have significant values not found in other ways of thinking about him. We look now at some of the significant values which Christians discerned in it.

A Formula for Our Thinking

For one thing, it should be remembered that it is a formula, a way of thinking about God. It is a symbol by which the mind can better comprehend God. God is what he is, quite independently of our thoughts about him. He has many ways of approaching men and disclosing himself to men and he doubtless can meet men and save them even though they do not understand the intricacies of trinitarianism. But as men think of God and seek to understand his nature and relationships, they have been helped by symbols which guard against error on the one hand and clarify the truth of Christian belief on the other. This is a symbol and formula which holds together in the mind at one time both the unity of God and a kind of plurality in his being which does not break up the unity.

Many analogies have been used throughout history, other than that of *una substantia, tres personae.* God is like one tree with root, trunk, and fruit or like one river with spring, stream, and estuary. God is like a thinker with mind, thought, and speech. God is like a self-conscious mind which is a unity of subject and object and knowledge of being both subject and object. But the Trinity does not originate from these analogies. It originates from the experience of God as Father, as Son, and as Holy Spirit. These analogies are at best instruments of comprehending God's unity in plurality and plurality in unity. This formula is not a mathematical monstrosity in that there are four terms used—God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is an essential feature of all thought and classification that one term is needed for each individual and another term is needed for their unity. This is the case whether we say, "Browning, Milton, and Shakespeare are poets," or "Lions, tigers, and leopards are cats," or "Jupiter, Mercury, and Saturn are planets."

God Was in Christ

Secondly, trinitarian thought gives metaphysical grounding in the nature and being of God for the historical fact of Jesus Christ. It means that Christ is the true revealer of God, the explicit activity of God. Men who saw Christ saw the glory of God himself shining in his face. He is the effulgence of God's glory and the express image of God's substance. In him God was seeking to save that which was lost.

This is the nub of the Nicaean concern. The trinitarians were earnestly asking whether this act of redemption was part of God's essential nature. They felt discerningly the implication that if God left the task of salvation to a subordinate being it was not part of his essential nature. It should not be said that the man Jesus of Nazareth was the second person of the Trinity. But it should be said that, by the Word's becoming flesh in him, "in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9). This is the heart of the trinitarian concern. This is the New Testament message. This is the distinctively Christian conception of God. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself."

We can say then that in important ways God is like Christ and God was doing the acts Christ performed. The heart of the universe is bared in him. The clue to history is given in him. Our hope for the future is secure in him. For in him we see the face of God.

God Visits His People in the Holy Spirit

Thirdly, trinitarian thought gives metaphysical grounding in the nature and being of God for the historical experience of the Holy Spirit. We shall consider this belief more fully in the next chapters. But here is where we can see the essential deity of the Holy Spirit's

work and presence. He does not brood over the earth or woo our hearts as a subordinate agent of God. It is God's own presence in our midst with which we deal.

A Way of Comprehending Truth

Fourthly, we have in trinitarian thought a view of God which is rich and varied and also unified. This is true for belief and it is true for worship. God is not a broad infinite blank or a "purple oblong blur." He is a vivid and active being who has color and fullness but he has the oneness which satisfies the thinking mind and the devoted heart. The variety has unity. The Father and the Son and the Spirit are distinguishable and yet they are one. "He who has seen me," said Jesus Christ, "has seen the Father" (John 14:9). "The Lord is the Spirit," said Paul (2 Corinthians 3:17). In and through the Son we "have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Ephesians 2:18).

In the New Testament there is an almost perplexing interchangeability among the three persons of the Trinity. But they are focalized and unified in the nature and being of God. This "togetherness" in the Godhead gives a rich meaning to the idea that God is *agapé* love. It implies that there is a quality of fellowship and mutuality in the very nature of God, in the fullness of his being. Before God ever said, "Let us make man in our image" (Genesis 1:26), God was already the fullness of love in his own being. This is the wealth and unified sufficiency of God, according to trinitarian thought.

This fullness of the Godhead enriches not only our thought but also our worship. Our hymns find both richness and unity this way.

> Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
> Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;

Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!
God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity!

To Thee, great One in Three,
Eternal praises be
Hence evermore.
Thy sovereign majesty
May we in glory see,
And to eternity
Love and adore.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be,
World without end. Amen.

Our hymns do not always gather the fullness of the Godhead into such complete unity. There is also freedom, in this mode of thought about God, to address these hymns now to one and now to another person of the Godhead. Familiar instances are *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind* and *This Is My Father's World; O Could I Speak the Matchless Worth* and *Strong Son of God, Immortal Love; Breathe Upon Us, Holy Spirit* and *Gracious Spirit, Dwell With Me.*

Our ceremonies find both richness and unity in this way. Especially is this true of Christian baptism. The New Testament is most explicit on the fullness of the Godhead in the full baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19. It is interesting to note that the creed which Eusebius proposed to the Nicaean Council in 325 was a baptismal formula. It is interesting to note also that a group like the Church of the Brethren, one of the least creedal of the churches, practices in its fullest form a ceremony of baptism in harmony with trinitarian thought—trine immersion. They share with other immersionists the belief that complete dipping under water is the New Testament

symbol for sin cleansing and of being buried and raised again with Christ into newness of life. They differ with most other immersionists in the use of three separate dips in the one rite of baptism. This is not because of additional cleansing symbolism, as such—that three dips will make one cleaner than one. It is related rather to the fullness of the Godhead.

The argument for three dips in one baptism—trine immersion—follows lines similar to the argument for three persons in the one Godhead.[6] It is thus made explicitly clear that New Testament baptism is far more significant than pagan lustrations or than Jewish proselyte baptisms. It is baptism into the name of God the Father, who created and sustains us; into the name of the Son, who is our Redeemer and Lord; and into the name of the Holy Spirit, who possesses us and makes us holy. Most forms of baptism used by Christians retain some minimum meaning parallel to the trinitarian view of God. No Christian group retains this meaning more completely than those who practice trine immersion.

Our prayers likewise find both richness and unity in trinitarian terms. That is true of the following prayers:

> Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

> O God, who art the Father of all, and who alone makest men to be of one mind in an house, we beseech thee to grant to us, by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, a fuller realization of our brotherhood in thee; remove all anger and bitterness, and deepen

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[6] See H. C. Early's paper, "What the Church Stands For: Her Doctrines," in *Two Centuries of the Church of the Brethren: Bicentennial Addresses* (Elgin: Brethren Publishing House, 1908), pages 137-139.

in us a sense of truth and equity in our dealings with one another, for the sake of thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This is true pointedly and familiarly in the apostolic benediction which forms the framework of this study: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:14).

The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

As we come to the third part of the apostolic benediction we deal with materials at once more vague and more specific than those involved in the other two parts. The highly theological formulations of Christian belief in the classical creeds had far more to say about God as creative and controlling Father and as revealing and redeeming Son than they did about God as energizing and unifying Spirit. At the simpler level of Christian doctrine, likewise, teaching has been clearer and fuller about God the Father and about God in Christ the Son than it has about God's indwelling presence as the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, the experience of the Spirit has been widespread, vivid, and quickening throughout Christian history. Belief in the Holy Spirit has been prevalent more as a concrete experience than as a scheme of thought. It should be both, but it is primarily a doctrine of Christian experience. It is a belief about man's participation in the divine life. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which flows from and expresses the love of God the Father brings about a new kind of life: fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This will be considered in terms of the fellowship which the individual believer has with God through the Holy Spirit. It will be considered also in terms of the new community of believers in Christ—the fellowship bound together by the presence of God himself in the Holy Spirit. This fellowship centers in the church, where it embraces

the individual believer in its fold. The fellowship in the church is both the primary instrument of the divine society on earth and the earnest and down payment of its fulfillment in heaven.

Thus the full flowering of trinitarian thought becomes manifest in the Christian's experience of fellowship. God is present in his immediacy and immanence. Christ is present in an abiding and universal manner. God's wayward children the world over are wooed toward the high and holy level of intimacy with him and with each other, which can be accurately described as "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit."

CHAPTER TEN

I Will Pour Out My Spirit

THE DOCTRINE AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT have had an important place in Christian history. The New Testament is pre-eminently a book concerning this doctrine and experience. Nearly all its books refer to the Spirit in some way. The Gospels carry the promise and Acts the rich fulfillment of a new era of the Holy Spirit's presence and power. There are two hundred twenty references to *the Spirit* or *Spirit;* ninety-one to *the Holy Spirit* or *Holy Spirit.* There are nineteen references to the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of God the Father, or the Spirit of the Father; and there are five references to the Spirit of his Son, the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, or the Spirit of Christ. These three hundred thirty-five references are in addition to one hundred thirty-four in the Old Testament in which the word *Spirit* is used with supernatural meaning. More than by word count, the importance of the Holy Spirit is indicated in the promises of Jesus Christ to his disciples (Luke 24:49; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; Acts 1:5, 8); in the experience of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41); and by being included in the baptismal formula (Matthew 28:19) and the apostolic benediction (2 Corinthians 13:14).

This importance shown in the Bible has also been shown in Christian history. As we have seen, the doctrine of Christ was the primary occasion of framing trinitarian thought but the Holy Spirit was included in the final formula and in the completed creeds. The place of the

Spirit in the creeds was matched by his work in periodic outbursts of quickening power which gave new vitality to the Christian movement. There has ever been a close connection between this quickened power and emphasis upon belief in the Holy Spirit. They tend to increase and decrease together—the experience of the power and the emphasis upon the belief.

Questions People Raise

Along with this central importance of belief in the Holy Spirit, there are often serious misgivings people have about the matter. Questions perplex their minds and cause confusion, controversy, and lack of free-flowing power. It may profit us to explore several of them.

The Words Which We Use

There is some question because of the words which are used. The word used in the Old Testament was the Hebrew *ruach,* which means breath or wind. The Spirit of God was thought of as some objective force which would sweep in upon a man, much as a gust would blow across the desert, and cause him to do things beyond his own strength. This force, in its fuller meaning, was regarded not merely as an influence coming remotely from God but as God's own living presence in the experience of men and at work in the world.

In the New Testament the word was the Greek *pneuma,* which likewise means breath or wind. We are more familiar with this root meaning because we use it in such words as *pneumatic* and *pneumonia.* These latter words are so common in their usage that some people are offended or amused when the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is called pneumatology. Reading the New Testament, however, gives one the sense that the Holy Spirit is a

robust, full-bodied presence moving in and out among men giving them power and vitality. They are bereft and weak when the Spirit is absent and disturbed when he haunts their consciences. Here again the Holy Spirit is God's own living presence in the experience of men and at work in the world.

Our English words are also confusing. Up until recently the term used was *Holy Ghost.* That still appears in older Bibles, prayers, and hymns. But for most people *ghost* is a spooky kind of word taken only half seriously. It is difficult to use it in its earlier religious meaning. The term coming into wide use is *Holy Spirit. Spirit* is from the Latin word *spiritus,* meaning also to breathe or to blow. It has over a score of meanings listed in the dictionary and its uses are wide, ranging from spirits of ammonia and spiritous liquors to a spirited horse or an inspired poet. It is used for inner motivation and attitude, for the unifying force or vital principle of a college or a nation, or for the force which possesses a genius and gives him unusual powers. In spite of these widely varied and sometimes vague usages, it is a good and acceptable word to refer to the personal presence and active power of the living God himself at work in the world.

The Immanence of God

Other questions arise as to the relation of the Holy Spirit to the immanence of God our Father and to the indwelling Christ. It is argued that these ideas all refer to the same experience and thus make the concept of the Holy Spirit superfluous. Our discussion of the Trinity has already urged the unity of the Godhead. There is therefore strong identity among these forms of Christian experience. It is precisely the immanence of God which we experience in the Holy Spirit. Paul, in Athens, made close identity

between them. The God who made the world and everything in it and who made from one every nation of men is the one about whom he also said, "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:24-28).

We speak of the Holy Spirit as personal, not to make of him a "personality" separate from God but to identify him with God. If we think of the Holy Spirit as God himself we are freed from the temptation to speak of him as "it." There is a distinct advantage to thinking of the immanence of God in terms of the Holy Spirit, for then we have a mode of thought which enables us to think of him at the same time as transcendent. We can think of God as the "Beyond" who is also "within." We can think of God in terms adequate to his role as Creator of the vast and complicated universe at the same time that he moves within our hearts.

The Indwelling Christ

What about the indwelling Christ and the Holy Spirit? Here again we are quite as concerned to affirm unity and identity of experience as we are to affirm distinction. Yet they are distinguishable. Historically, of course, the Holy Spirit was at work in the world before the Word became flesh. The Holy Spirit was the agent of Jesus' birth, came upon him at baptism, led him through temptation to victory, and empowered him to fulfill his appointed ministry. After Jesus' resurrection and departure, the Holy Spirit was given as another Helper and Presence to be among the disciples in Christ's stead. He was the living presence who freed Christ from spatial limitations. Now the Christians could discern Christ's presence in universal fashion. Christ was and is alive forevermore among us through the Holy Spirit.

When we think of this universal and permanent

presence we can do it best in terms of the Holy Spirit. When we think of the nature and character, the will and activity of this presence, we should remember him as Christ living in us through the Holy Spirit. Distinctions can thus be made, but the identity of the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit should also be kept in mind. In any case it is important to note that the era of fullness of the Spirit was made possible by Christ's mission and ministry. That which was promised through the prophets Jeremiah (31:31-34) and Joel (2:28-32) was fulfilled among the disciples who had been with Jesus. Through Christ, God brought about his declared intention: "I will pour out my Spirit." It is important also to note that the character and nature of the Holy Spirit was revealed by Jesus Christ. The standard for testing the spirits to see whether they be of God is fixed in Jesus Christ, who has come in the flesh (1 John 4:1, 2).

Man's Part in Christian Experience

We have been looking at God's part in man's salvation and we can see that it is amazing and tremendous. There are many views of religion as primarily the quest of man —for the truth, for the good life, for life's fulfillment, or even for God himself. As against these views, we see in the Bible and in the Christian faith an opposite quest—from God toward man.

God's Part Is Great

God made man a free creature for a high destiny. God administers the natural and moral orders within which alone man can grow into intelligence and moral character. God blesses our right efforts with approval and joy and judges our errors with pain and frustration. Even in man's sin and waywardness, God's pursuant love has

taken availing steps toward his restoration. God's part in salvation is so great as to seem almost total and overwhelming. His sovereignty and initiative have been truly discerned by men like Barth of Basel, Calvin of Geneva, Augustine of Hippo, and Paul of Tarsus. God's priority in salvation is called, in theological terms, prevenient grace and pursuant love. In Scriptural language we read of it, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9). It is also a recurrent theme in the language of devotion.

> I find, I walk, I love, but, oh, the whole
> Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee!
> For Thou wert long beforehand with my soul;
> Always Thou lovedst me.

In the language of grace, God's part is primary, amazing, overwhelming.

Man's Part Is Also Significant

But classic theologies have been singularly silent on man's part in salvation. They have overlooked explicit Scriptural statements such as "For we are fellow workmen for God" (1 Corinthians 3:9); "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12); or, "Strive to enter by the narrow door" (Luke 13:24). They have overlooked the constant appeal of Scripture to man's response by reason, by trust, by repentance, by faith, by obedience. They have overlooked the nature of God's love which seeks to evoke free response by persuasion. They have overlooked the actuality of man's own experience of salvation, the terms of which are especially familiar to all evangelical Christians. The grace of Christ and the love of the Father become matters of Christian

experience as men have fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Man must himself participate in the divine life. In this participation man's salvation becomes effective in his experience. Let us note the terms of man's response to God's overtures.

Repentance

Repentance is in the forefront of our response to God. John the Baptist and Jesus started their public ministry with the clarion call to repentance because the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). The apostles carried on their ministry with the same note (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30). The word they used means to change one's mind, and in this case the mind refers to the center of the whole personality. "Repentance is the turning away from a life of sin, the breaking off from evil, because of a change of mind in which a new and better standard of life has been accepted."[1] To repent, according to Webster's definition, is "to amend or resolve to amend one's life as a result of contrition for one's sins." It is not worldly sorrow or paralyzing remorse, but a basic revulsion against one's whole pattern of life, which issues in an inner about-face of direction. It is marked by sorrow and regret. It is often as painful as the breaking of a bone so that it can be reset. The essential feature is the change of mind and of the direction of one's life. An Old Testament equivalent is *to turn* and *to return*—to turn from transgression and wickedness and to turn toward God and the way of righteousness. These are also the words of the Apostle Paul to the Jews and to the Gentiles: "that they should repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of repentance" (Acts 26:20).

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[1] William N. Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1898), page 402.

Repentance has a distinct "turning point" of change and thus it may be regarded as a specific act. It is accompanied, however, by abhorrence of sins and of sinful desires and it involves a turning toward the good and toward complete amendment of life. It involves, from a practical point of view, confession of one's sins so as to have them effectively dealt with. Such confession must be made freely to God. Much help is gained by making confession to a Christian friend and counselor. Most of this should be done in private even when done in the name of the church. On occasion there is value in open confession to the congregation. Repentance involves not only such confession but often restitution as well. If repentance is genuine it leads to efforts to restore ill-gotten property, to rectify deceits, to clarify misunderstandings, and to reconcile estrangements. In such efforts one is aided by the promptings and strength given by the Holy Spirit. As a result of such efforts God pours out his Spirit more fully upon his repentant children.

Faith

Another central element in man's response is faith. Faith is a common religious word but it is complex in its meaning. To have faith is to believe in a fact, to acknowledge a truth. Accordingly, we are admonished to repent and believe the gospel. Having faith goes farther than this, for even the demons believe and shudder. "Faith in Christ is trustful recognition of the saving love of God in Christ, with humble and willing acceptance of the forgiveness and holy life that it offers."[2]

Faith is the commitment of the believer to a life of discipleship. The life of faith is a life of faithfulness and obedience. This experience of faith and trust has a

[2] Clarke, *op. cit.*, page 404.

quietistic aspect to it. It is an act of complete relaxation and surrender to the love and grace of God.

> Just as I am, without one plea
> But that Thy blood was shed for me,
> And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
> O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

This mood of complete surrender and rest in the love of God is a characteristic response of faith. William James describes it thus:

> There is a state of mind, known to religious men, but to no others, in which the will to assert ourselves and hold our own has been displaced by a willingness to close our mouths and be as nothing in the floods and waterspouts of God. . . . The time for tension in our soul is over, and that of happy relaxation, of calm deep breathing, of an eternal present, with no discordant future to be anxious about, has arrived.[3]

This quiet mood is expressed in the current counseling phrase, *being accepted.* Much more is involved in the implications of the experience. But here is good news indeed, that by the grace and love of God we can surrender for we now belong again. There is, however, also an activistic aspect to this experience of faith. It is implied in the act of commitment wherein we not only surrender to Christ but also espouse the life of discipleship. "Our wills are ours, we know not how. Our wills are ours to make them Thine." It is an act of the total personality in full response to the grace of Christ and the love of God.

It Is a Total Experience

Viewed as a whole, this experience is called justification by faith, reconciliation to God, or regeneration. One is spoken of as being born again (John 3:3, 5, 7) and as being a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). In

[3] *Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1922), pages 46, 47. Reprinted by permission of Paul R. Reynolds & Son, 599 Fifth Avenue, New York 17.

psychological terms it is often called conversion, which, according to William James, is "the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities."[4]

Such an experience is sometimes sudden, intense, and dramatic, as was the case of Saul on his way to Damascus. But even then there are indications of preparatory steps in "the raging fury" of his persecution, in his sharp memory of consenting to Stephen's death, and in the kicking "against the goads" (Acts 26:9-14). Others experience this conversion over a longer period of time and may have difficulty in pinpointing just where the decisive corner was turned, or the borderline was crossed.

> As passing southward I may cross the line
> Between the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans;
> I cannot tell by any startling sounds or strange commotions
> Across my track.
> But if the days grow brighter one by one,
> And e'en the icebergs melt their hardened faces,
> And sailors linger, basking in the sun,
> I know I must have made the change of places
> Some distance back.
>
> When answering still the Savior's call
> I passed the bourne of life and came to Him,
> When in my love for Him I gave up all,
> The very hour when I knew I knew Him
> I cannot tell.
> But as unceasingly I feel his love,
> As this cold heart is melted to o'erflowing,
> As now so clear His life shines from above,
> I marvel at the change and press on, knowing
> That all is well.[5]

[4] *Op. cit.*, page 189.

[5] Author unknown.

Becoming a Christian is likened to being born again because it marks a distinct beginning of the divine life. It is being born from above, being born of the Spirit. By the response of repentance and faith to God's overtures, a man enters into a relationship and a kind of life which is new, a life lived in fellowship with God through participation in the Holy Spirit.

Growth in the Spiritual Life

Being born again does not imply that one has attained maturity in the Christian life. Sometimes when people change suddenly and dramatically it appears that their life in grace is complete. Sometimes also we hear it said or implied that, if a Christian backslides or falls short, he was not truly converted in the first place. But birth implies growth. A new creature is a new beginning. Conversion and rebirth are in themselves valid experiences and specific events. But they are also commitments to subsequent growth. The coming of a newborn child is a lovely event with delightful meaning in itself. But it is the saddest of tragedies if growth is retarded. Birth is a promise of growth. Or, if a child is adopted, the act of adoption is a very significant event in itself. New relationships have been established. The child now belongs completely to the family. But the full implications of the act require a lifetime of growth in the new relationship. The description of this growth is set forth in the doctrine of sanctification.

There are varied aspects of sanctification which are differently emphasized in the definitions. In addition to sanctification as a process of growth, John Wesley stressed suddenness: "Sanctification in the proper sense is an instantaneous deliverance from all sin, and includes an instantaneous power then given always to cleave unto

God." William N. Clarke stresses the ongoing process. "Sanctification is the carrying on of the divine life toward perfection. It is the maintaining and strengthening of that holy disposition which God imparts in regeneration."[6] In broad terms we may apply the word *justification* to the experience of reconciliation and rebirth and the word *sanctification* (being made holy) to the process of growth in the life of the Holy Spirit. We should not draw our lines too sharply, however, for we are always justified by faith and the Spirit is at work both at the beginning and afterwards making us holy. There is no effort in Scripture to draw neat lines or to press for a precise order of sequence. Note Paul's words as an example: "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). Sanctification is, in short, the fellowship and the participation we have with the Holy Spirit. In this fellowship with him he does his sanctifying works. Let us note some of them.

Cleansing and Purification

He cleanses and purifies us. It is his presence which disturbs our consciences and convicts us of sin (John 16:8). So important is his work in moving us to repentance that we are warned against grieving him (Ephesians 4:30) lest we pass the point of no return. The sin against the Holy Spirit lies in so disregarding or rejecting his promptings that we can no longer tell what is from God and what is from Satan. It is hardly for us to know just where that point is passed, but the warnings are sharp and the end is perilous (Mark 3:22-30; Hebrews 6:1-4). If and as we respond to his promptings, however, he pours God's love into our hearts (Romans 5:5) and sets us free

[6] *Op. cit.*, page 409.

from sin (Romans 8:2). We not only have our sins forgiven but our hearts are so filled with the Spirit's presence that he bears his own fruit of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22). Our lives are purified not by repression but by a new and magnificent obsession. This is far more than "the power of positive thinking." It is "the expulsive power of a new affection."

Comfort and Assurance

He gives us comfort and assurance. *Comfort* is not a word of cozy pampering but one of courage and fortitude. Comfort is a gift of strength to endure trials. In times of pain sustaining power is given. In times of sorrow and bereavement courage is bestowed. This is the Spirit's answer to the problem of suffering. It is not as an easy or neat intellectual formula but as strength and comfort. It does not deny the pain or answer all the questions. But we do not lose heart, because the Comforter and Helper whom Christ promised has come to our side. "I know I cannot drift beyond his love and care."

Assurance is needed to give us a sense of personal worth. Through the Holy Spirit, God assures us of our genuine significance. In our inner privacy, where we are utterly alone, we still have an infallible companion. It is said that when John and Tom are together there are really six persons present: John's John, Tom's John, and the real John; Tom's Tom, John's Tom, and the real Tom. This real John and this real Tom are what they are in solitude. But they are not alone. Their names are known. They are given a sense of security and assurance in this inner center of residual privacy.

Assurance and security are also given as to the future. Sometimes this is set forth in a rigid doctrine of eternal

security. It is argued that once we are in grace we are always in grace. This overlooks the plain word of Scripture that we can be partakers of the Holy Spirit and then fall away (Hebrews 6:4-6). Or it is argued that, since we are saved by grace, our daily walk does not affect our salvation. This overlooks the parable of the last judgment (Matthew 25:31-46) and it overlooks the exclusion of the unrighteous (immoral, thieves, drunkards, etc.) from the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9). But there is assurance as to the future. So long as we keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude 21) nothing can separate us from it (Romans 8:38). We can be sure enough to be free from anxiety and to live our lives in joy. Our fellowship with the Holy Spirit brings us comfort and assurance.

Illumination and Guidance

He gives us illumination and guidance. These both refer to the experience of knowledge. The Spirit gives us knowledge through the full exercise of our rational powers, not against them. And yet we can discern that his own presence adds something to ordinary experiences of knowledge. Jesus called him the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). He does not bring truth contrary to Christ himself, who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). But he does take the truth of Christ and illuminate it so that it can be more fully discerned.

It is a common human experience that truth comes as a gift when our further striving for it is a vain endeavor. This was the case with Archimedes in his search for the principle of specific gravity. It "came" to him in his bath and caused him to shout, "Eureka, I found it." It was the case with Albert Schweitzer in Africa when he was searching for a satisfying ethical principle for his philosophy of life.

> For months on end I lived in a continual state of mental excitement. . . . I was wandering about in a thicket in which no path was to be found. I was leaning with all my might against an iron door which would not yield. . . . Lost in thought I sat on the deck of the barge (steaming slowly up the Congo), struggling to find the elementary and universal conception of the ethical which I had not discovered in any philosophy. Sheet after sheet I covered with disconnected sentences, merely to keep myself concentrated on the problem. Late on the third day, at the very moment when, at sunset, we were making our way through a herd of hippopotamuses, there flashed upon my mind, unforeseen and unsought, the phrase, "Reverence for life."[7]

Many a minister and Bible student has found, in similar fashion, that a passage will take on a gleam of meaning which can be ascribed only to immediate illumination by the Holy Spirit.

In the case of guidance, the knowledge received is not in the nature of general insight, but rather an indication of direction in making some important choice. Here again the Spirit uses all our ordinary capacities of judgment and evaluation. But life's choices have to be made about a future still unknown. How can one find and follow the will of God about a career, a life's companion, a move to college or to a given job? It is the testimony of Scripture and of many Christians that in such critical choices a word of guidance is given. This comes after checking many avenues of wisdom such as Scripture, counseling with friends, prayer, study, and exploring alternative opportunities. It comes in a mood of complete readiness to follow the leads which may be given. Sometimes it comes swiftly and clearly before the choice is made. Sometimes it comes as a mood of confirmation after a seemingly ambiguous choice has been made. But it comes, as it came to Paul in Troas. Those who follow such

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[7] *Out of My Life and Thought* (New York: Henry Holt, 1933, 1939), pages 184-186. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

guidance live with the sense of God's hand upon them and in fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

Enabling Grace

The Holy Spirit is an enabling Spirit. He gives us capacity and energy to do our work and to achieve competence. In part this is given in the inborn abilities and capacities we receive at birth. These aptitudes and capacities are subjected to scientific measurement and described by laws of heredity. But their religious nature is indirectly acknowledged when we speak of talented and gifted people. As in the case of Bezalel, to whom the Spirit gave skill in craftsmanship (Exodus 31:2-5), it is the Christian belief that this distribution of capacities is not merely a matter of chance but is under the operation of God's providence through his Holy Spirit. The special power released by fear or sudden emergency is rightly ascribed to the Spirit's presence. One does on such occasions act as if possessed.

When we reach the higher capacities of the arts and of prophecy and preaching, it is still clearer that special enabling grace is given by the Holy Spirit. "To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he will" (1 Corinthians 12:8-11). In all of these functions there is inborn capacity which needs to be developed by discipline. But beyond the sweat and toil there is inspiration from

above which enables devoted persons to outdo themselves. In the whole range of life's concerns, the Christian believer has the privilege of living and working, serving and growing in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. For we live in the era when God is ready to pour out his Spirit upon all flesh.

Prayer and the Life of the Spirit

In harmony with man's important part in Christian experience, there are many things a man can do to foster the life of the Spirit. All the exercises and disciplines of daily life can be means of grace if they are engaged in as within God's providential care. Appointments and disappointments alike, if God's will in them is discerned and accepted, can be occasions of spiritual growth. Acts of kindness and mercy, work well done, and responsible participation in family and community life—all human experience forms the texture and context of the life of the Spirit.

Within this framework, prayer and personal communion with God are the vitalizing center of the spiritual life. Prayer and the Holy Spirit have a reciprocal relation. We receive the Holy Spirit in answer to prayer. "Ask, and it will be given you. . . . If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" (Luke 11:9, 13). At the same time we are helped in our prayers by the Spirit's presence, "for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:26).

Aspects of Prayer

Prayer is of many types and forms. The following aspects of the exercise of prayer may be distinguished even

though they may overlap or have varied combinations of elements.

Adoration is an aspect of prayer. We pray when we contemplate God's greatness and his goodness. It is a rewarding spiritual exercise to dwell upon God's nature—upon his love, his holiness, his power, his many-splendored being. Prayer in this aspect is the exposing of one's soul to all that is highest and best and in active appreciation of what is good and true and right. It is being "open-doored to God." Praise and adoration become natural expressions of the soul as it addresses God and ascribes to him the qualities which belong to him.

Thanksgiving is likewise an aspect of prayer. There seems to be a natural gratitude which springs up when we receive gifts and rewards. This is greatly heightened when we stand in the presence of the giver. Thanksgiving is the expression of this gratitude to the Great Giver. The spirit of gratitude increases as we recount the gifts. "Count your many blessings, name them one by one" is a good exhortation. There is no better place to take hold of prayer than in this aspect of thanksgiving.

Confession is another aspect of prayer. It is a natural result and a logical step following adoration of God for his goodness and thanks to him for his bounty. Nothing shows us up so thoroughly as this. By comparison we are unworthy and unprofitable servants. After Isaiah saw the Lord in his holiness and glory, he cried, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips . . ." (Isaiah 6:5). This is the experience of repentance, wherein we see ourselves from God's point of view and we are ashamed of ourselves. The prayer of confession is the road to cleansing and to the nurture of the spiritual life.

Petition is an aspect of prayer. It is commonly regarded

as the essence of prayer. *Pray* and *beg* are regarded as synonyms. But we have seen that petition stands beside other aspects of prayer. Petition is in true perspective after adoration, thanksgiving, and confession. These three are not to "soften up" God so that he will grant our petitions, but they are rather to prepare us to ask according to God's will and to receive his gifts as his responsive children.

Communion is also an aspect of prayer. It is not specifically a step in prayer but rather the total relationship of prayer as a divine-human encounter. It is living in the presence of God and being in the fellowship of his Spirit. Before, during, and after all other aspects of prayer, we are in direct communion with God himself.

Problems About Prayer

As universal and natural as prayer seems to be, it is strange that many men fail to pray. Even the disciples were given the parable of the importunate widow "to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1-8). What keeps men from praying?

Some refrain from praying because they think God is too busy to be concerned with their individual petitions. Jesus was very eager to make it clear that the world is not too complicated for God to manage. The very hairs of our heads are numbered. This is not to say that God is cluttered up with filing cabinets and serial numbers, but it is a vivid way of saying that each immortal soul is within his fatherly care. As a shepherd cares for one lamb out of a hundred, so God cares for each one of his children. He knows them by name and he hears their whispered and lonely requests before they are fully formed. Nothing is too big for God and nothing is too small.

Some refrain from praying because they feel the force and regularity of natural law. In one sense, and

often, men are helped by this fact. The law of the harvest works in their behalf. If God were a God of caprice there would be no basis for expecting him to grant our requests. It is the regularities of God's providence which are the foundation of morality. There are laws of the spiritual life. "He who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Galatians 6:8b).

We need not refrain from prayer, however, in cases of special need, as if God could not change his usual ways of working. God is himself the Lord of nature and the administrator of the moral order. This is an open universe and it is under the free and benevolent control of our heavenly Father. We can pray for anything at all and if it be his will he can do it. There is point to the advice often heard: "Take everything to God. Talk everything over with God. Leave everything to God."

Others refrain from prayer because of the problem of "unanswered" prayer. This is a baffling experience indeed and it cannot be dealt with by glib comments. It helps to note, however, that there are different answers to prayer. God answers the man even though he may not grant the request. Sometimes the answer is "No." This was the case with Jesus' anguished petition in Gethsemane. It was not possible for the cup to be removed from him (Mark 14:32-42). It was the case with Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). Sometimes the answer is "Not yet," and it is necessary to go on in faith and patient endurance until in God's own appointed time the request is granted.

Still others refrain from prayer because they have questions about praying for others. Does God work directly on others in answer to our petition? Is it right for him to invade their freedom at our request? All we can say here is that strong love for others makes it most

natural to pray for them just as we would pray for ourselves. We need a renewed sense of our corporate unity with all other members of the body of Christ. We are bound together in a bundle of life so that "if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Corinthians 12:26). We need a fuller understanding of our unity in love and of the bond among us which is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This will be our concern in the next chapter.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Holy Spirit and the Life of Fellowship

THE HOLY SPIRIT BRINGS MEN INTO HIS FELLOWSHIP BOTH through their private individual experience and through their experience in group life. The Holy Spirit comes to them as private individuals in inner areas of experience which they do not share with others. He speaks to them an individual word which sometimes leads them to say, "We must obey God rather than man." He quickens the conscience and sometimes lays private claims on them which are more imperious than all the cautions or counsels of friends. This is why religion is defined as what a man does in his solitariness. Because of this validation by an inner voice, lone prophets have stood out against all their fellows in judgment or in call to high endeavor. Were it not for such inner validation by the Holy Spirit's presence they would be merely deviant individuals who would be rightly discounted or opposed. But because the Spirit of truth is with them, they do not walk alone. One with God is a majority. Blessed is the man who thus shares in fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit meets men also in fellowship with others. In their group life there is another presence in their midst who binds them together. This togetherness which they have is what is variously called communion, community, brotherhood, or fellowship. In this sense the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is not only the participation a man has directly with the Holy Spirit; it is more specifically the fellowship a man has with his brothers

because the Holy Spirit binds them together. The Holy Spirit thus comes at a man through his experience of fellowship with his brothers. God can do many things for a man through this brotherhood that he cannot do for him directly just as he can do things for a man directly which he cannot do through the fellowship.

Man Is Bipolar in His Spiritual Life

It is important to remember that all men are both private individuals and participants in group life. No one is all one or all the other. Men are two-sided or bipolar persons, and God comes at them from both sides or poles. If either pole is overlooked or exaggerated the man's personality becomes distorted and out of balance. This is as true at the level of man's religious and spiritual life as it is at any other level. If the individual and private part of man's life is stunted or disregarded he is deprived of freedom, individuality, initiative, and creativity. He is merely a conformist, a cog in a machine, a flat and colorless unit in the mass. He asks no questions and makes no responsible judgments. Societies, cultures, and religious groups made up of such docile and uniform individuals tend to become static, conventional, and custombound. They put the traditions of men ahead of the commandment of God (Mark 7:9-13). It is to such societies that God sends his nonconforming prophets. They act as gadflies, agitators, and disturbers of the people. Such irritating and indigestible personalities are often themselves out of balance and are never welcomed by their people. But God uses them and their vision of truth to bring a clear and corrective word of judgment to his people. "Where there is no prophecy the people cast off restraint" (Proverbs 29:18). These deviant individuals are used by the Holy Spirit as God's gift to his people.

If the social and community part of a man's life is stunted or disregarded, he is deprived of the disciplines and satisfactions of fellowship. He becomes isolated, self-centered, and lonely. He misses the stimulus and development of personality which can take place only when he participates in wholesome group life. His hungers for acceptance and love are starved and his soul withers when he is cut off from his fellows. Our word *idiot* comes from the Greek word meaning private, peculiar, alone. It is sad when a child is born thus without adequate mental equipment to participate in social communication. It is likewise sad when by selfishness or a false notion of the spiritual life persons wall themselves off from fellowship. There are those who set their own spiritual insights and judgments against all others so completely that they shrivel up. They claim to have private wires with heaven. Occasionally they are right, to be sure, but usually wisdom is found in the multitude of counsel. Even when one is right and others are mistaken, the Christian should speak the truth in love and in humility. Such Christian graces are nurtured in fellowship. The Holy Spirit meets men in fellowship and bestows his gifts and graces on them as they live together.

Levels of Fellowship

There are many kinds of togetherness, many bonds that tie one man to another.

The Brotherhood of Race

Men are bound together by blood ties. They have a biological unity with each other from the time of creation. God has created of one blood every nation of men on all the face of the earth. This is brotherhood of race. It is an elemental level of fellowship. All men

"belong" to the human race. That is their "kind." There are many variations among different races and tribes. But their similarities are greater than their differences. This is the basic level of fellowship which all men sustain to each other. It is original and given to men as men. They can deny it formally and exclude some tribes or races as "lesser breeds without the law." But they cannot escape it. This racial level of fellowship provides the basis of other levels, although it does not of itself produce them.

The Brotherhood of Place

A second level of fellowship is the sharing of a common culture. It is usually a common racial group which shares a common culture. But they can become separated and take on separate cultures. Or people of different racial stocks can share the same culture. They can share the same language, political affiliation, historical experience, and economic development. Of such common fellowship states and nations consist. They share the same territory and economy and participate in the same common life. This cultural level of fellowship is brotherhood of place. Those who are in it rejoice to say, "This is my own, my native land." This level of fellowship is given by God and is under his providential control. He determines their "allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). He is the Lord and the Judge of the nations.

The Brotherhood of Grace

It is one thing to be born of the same stock and to share a common economy and culture. It is something quite beyond these to share an intimate fellowship of the spirit. This is fellowship at a deeper level. Men are often close together in space and still far apart in spirit. Intimate spiritual fellowship is often furthered by racial

kinship and by participation in common life, but it goes beyond them. It is a fellowship and sharing of the deeper things of life—of aspiration and ideals, of hope and worship, of forgiveness and love. In short, it is a fellowship based on our common redemption in Christ—the brotherhood of grace. This brotherhood strengthens other levels of fellowship and also has qualities of its own. It takes on a character of its own. It fulfills functions of its own. This is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit that came to early and classic expression on Pentecost and has been multiplied repeatedly since then.

The Meaning of Pentecost

Pentecost was not the beginning of the church, for the friends and followers of Jesus had already been with him. Some of them had spent three years in his company. It was not the first manifestation of the Holy Spirit. He had been active on occasions in the Old Testament era and he had been especially active in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:10-12; Luke 4:14, 18). But after Jesus was gone, the promise of Jesus to his disciples was fulfilled. The gift of the Spirit's presence was bestowed. As Jeremiah had predicted (31:31-34), God put his laws into their minds. As Joel had prophesied (2:28), God poured out his Spirit on all flesh. This experience now became universal and permanent. After the teaching and redeeming work of Christ and after a period of desire and waiting, a new experience of fellowship and power had come upon the disciples. God fused them together by the fullness of his own presence.

A Deep and Intense Experience

This new fellowship was deep and intense. The disciples were already gathered together in a company of

one hundred twenty. They were of one accord and in one place. Thus they were close together in spirit and in space. In addition to all these elements, something new emerged—a special inrush of God's own Spirit which bound them together at the deepest level of fellowship. There occurred a miracle of communication so that each understood in his own mother tongue. This did not eliminate rational discourse but they were put into such rapport with each other that meanings flowed among them in extrarational communication. It has perhaps never been exactly duplicated in all its forms. But often when Christians gather together in preaching and worship or in Bible study and prayer, a warm presence emerges in their midst which is none other than God's own Spirit. Sometimes this presence is discerned in a "holy hush" and sometimes it is so disturbing that the place is shaken (Acts 4:31). These experiences are more than ideas; they are events of participation which knit people together in precious and glowing fellowship.

An Inclusive and Unifying Experience

This new fellowship was inclusive and unifying. People from all walks of life and from widely scattered backgrounds were drawn into it. Three thousand souls were added in one day. It was a creative togetherness that broke down barriers and bound people together in the immediacy of God's presence. Persons who share such creative experiences can go on from there with a newly born brotherhood. They become a new people. They belong to each other in a new way. The middle walls of partition are broken down and groups formerly hostile are reconciled and bound into unity. It was this miracle of unifying fellowship that marked the early church. This was the beginning of the "ecumenical" movement.

It has happened many times since as these early conditions have been repeated. The writer visited the Garkida Leper Colony in Northern Nigeria and attended a worship service with over five hundred lepers. There were sixty-five tribes in this colony and they spoke fifty-one different languages and dialects. Mai Sule, the "African Prince," led the group in worship and in song. Thirteen different groups sang in sequence, each using their native language. Then all of the congregation sang together out of books printed in six languages. It was a miracle to see how the Spirit of God came upon that congregation and unified them across language barriers. Thus Pentecost ever overcomes Babel.

A Morally Uplifting and Purifying Experience

This new fellowship was morally uplifting and purifying. Those who were drawn into it were drawn into acts of love and helpfulness. They brought their goods, their money, and even their farms and laid them at the apostles' feet for distribution as any had need. So discerning and purifying was this fellowship that Ananias and Sapphira were stricken in judgment when they sought to exploit the fellowship by deceit. There has always been a danger that such intense religious movements tend to run into irresponsible excess. Men—and apparently women—tend to go off the deep end in such forms of spiritual experience. They get carried away and substitute emotional warmth for ethical behavior. The New Testament did not make this error. It saw truly that men are moved and possessed by powers beyond themselves. It saw also that these powers are both good and evil, and it laid stress on the ability of "distinguishing between spirits" (1 Corinthians 12:10).

The fellowship of the Holy Spirit is distinguished not

primarily by intensity and ecstasy but by love. All the diverse gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12, 13) are given for the upbuilding of the fellowship in love. The test of the Holy Spirit is the fruit of his presence—"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22, 23). The members of the early church were perhaps unconventional but they were exemplary. The word *holy* carried a strong moral quality and was not limited to the meanings of *awe* or *separated.*

An Experience of Power

This new fellowship was dynamic and filled with power. From Pentecost on, the Christians were marked by courage, irrepressibility, boldness, and joy. They had a contagious sense of adequacy. Persecution and threats could not stop their witnessing. They regarded such persecution and suffering as a cause for rejoicing that they were worthy to be witnesses. Their morale was high, their faith was strong, and their prayers were confident. "And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus" (Acts 4:29, 30). They had power to witness boldly, power to heal, power to endure persecution, power to multiply.

They had more than the glowing incandescence of Pentecost now. They also had the slower-burning fires of enduring faith. They had more than esprit-de-corps; they also had morale, the sustaining will to carry on their work and their witness. We can look back across the years and gather strength from the vindications of history. We can see that they were riding the wave of the future. But they gained their strength and certainty from an immediate

presence. They were sustained by the fellowship given to them by God's own Spirit. "And all that believed were together" (Acts 2:44).

An Organ of Insight

This new fellowship discovered truth and mediated guidance. "The Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them' " (Acts 13:2). Thus a movement of missionary expansion was started. "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . ." (Acts 15:28). In these words they prefaced the consensus of judgment at the Jerusalem conference. They had a complicated problem of the relation of Jews and Gentiles within the church. A conference was held which engaged in discussion, testimony, and deliberation. It concerned the whole church and they sought the solution together. They used the usual methods of seeking a wise solution but they felt a leading in their midst which was more than their pooled wisdom. Theirs was a fellowship of discernment and guidance.

Discussion and deliberation are not merely means of securing common agreement to a proposal. They are a means of seeking truth and guidance. It is often true, to be sure, that new truth arises in individual minds—and in minds freed from the meshes of immediate environment. But such creative minds themselves are nurtured and informed by the fellowship in which they function. Thus there are "schools" of thought and creative periods of literature, of scientific discovery, of art. In religion likewise there are great eras of reformulation of faith and fresh discernment of truth. Group life when lifted to the high level of Holy Spirit fellowship becomes "an organ of insight." It is especially important to have such a group

wrestle together with their problems and in the midst of their deliberations seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who is in their midst. Opinions may be expressed. Convictions should be stated. But no one should seek to dominate the others. All should seek together for a voice not their own. In such exercise wisdom is given from God.

A Matrix of Individual Growth

This new fellowship became an evangelizing and nurturing instrument. They worked sometimes as private individuals. But always there was the fellowship to which new converts were joined. On one day there were three thousand additions. As the witness was faithfully given, "more than ever believers were added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14). Early Christianity was strongly corporate. While individuals found new personal worth in Christ, this enhancement occurred in the fellowship.

It may be difficult to find prooftexts in the New Testament which argue that men must join a fellowship to be saved. One is practically limited to Hebrews 10:25 —"not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another." This infrequent reference is due to the fact that the fellowship is taken for granted as the normal evangelizing and nurturing instrument. It did not occur to them that anyone could live a Christian life in the kind of isolation which marks many individualists today. There were no hotels or private rooming houses such as make for anonymity today. People lived in families and they traveled by the hospitality of friends. They worked as slaves or in guilds. But in the Christian fellowship they had found a still richer mode of life. It was a new brotherhood. They were no longer slave or free, barbarian or Greek—all were one man in Christ Jesus. This fellowship is part of the grace of the gospel.

They regarded themselves as the household of God, as the body of Christ, as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Being baptized into Christ was to become a member of his body and his body was this fellowship.

This corporate aspect of salvation is especially needed today when people are lost in loneliness. They see hundreds of their fellows each day as they rush by in crowds. But they do not belong to them. They do not know each other's names and that deepens the wells of loneliness. What an evangelizing opportunity Christian fellowships have as they proclaim their welcoming gospel, "Come with us, and we will do you good" (Numbers 10:29). This also lays a special responsibility upon Christian fellowships lest they themselves become barriers to evangelism. Men sometimes say they are drawn to Christ but they find the church forbidding because of hypocrisy and pride, because of sin and shameful behavior among professed Christians. This is, of course, no adequate excuse for them but it does show how important a loving and exemplary fellowship is in the tasks of evangelism and nurture. Let us put out the welcome mat and put a light in every window so that more than ever believers be added to the Lord.

"Ardor and Order"[1]

As we consider the meaning of Pentecost we see how vivid, spontaneous and free the early church's religious life was. In comparison with it our own often seems to be fettered with rules, programs, definitions, ritualism, budgets, and schedules. We frequently regard such order and forms as the enemy and antithesis of the spiritual life. We assume that if we got rid of forms and rules we would increase spiritual depth.

[1] A phrase from John A. Mackay.

But spirit and form are not necessarily enemies of each other. These forms and rules can be used as means of grace for furthering the spiritual life. The experience of Pentecost occurred on a stated religious day in Jerusalem. Neither the special day nor the temple area hindered their life of fellowship. These furthered their fellowship. The apostles' doctrine furthered their fellowship. The breaking of bread and the leadership of the apostles furthered their fellowship. Order was an aid to ardor. In the distribution of their daily ministration the widows of the Hellenists were neglected. This was not for lack of spiritual fervor, for it was shortly after Pentecost. It was not for lack of goods, for they had everything in common and many brought lands and houses into the common treasury. What was lacking was precisely the requisite organization and program which would express their generous desires and promote their fellowship. So it is with all religious forms—they can be used and are indeed necessary for the fostering of the spiritual life.

The sabbath was made for man—not for him to disregard or to neglect, but precisely as an aid to his spiritual life. We need structure and order in our spiritual life. They are means of grace. We need stated places for common worship even though God is spirit and we must worship him in spirit and truth. We need stated practices to foster our worship even though God is always nearer than hands and feet. We need special persons to guide us in our common life, even though all believers are priests. We need special periods for worship even though all we do in word and deed is done unto the Lord. The Lord's Day has been a means of grace. John on the lonely isle of Patmos wrote, "I was in the Spirit on the

Lord's day" (Revelation 1:10). Such religious forms and practices are in the interest of the spiritual life.

Order is the means of ardor although these forms will not of themselves create spiritual life. That results only from the presence of God himself. And God moves into our midst in response to our welcome and desire. The Spirit of God comes to us in answer to prayer and as a gift to our surrendered lives. The life of the Spirit is furthered by love and forgiveness among the members of the fellowship. It is furthered by our faithful witness and compassionate service to those outside the fellowship. As our hearts are open the Spirit of God indwells us and binds us together more closely and works in us with grace and power. May the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

The Gift of the Spirit and the Gifts of the Spirit

The Spirit of God comes into our midst as a gift of God's love. He fills our individual lives and he suffuses our common life. He blesses us with his own personal presence and whatever he enables us to do he does from the inside out. Being in our midst he then distributes gifts and functions among us for the upbuilding of the body in love.

These gifts are varied capacities and functions which we fulfill in the fellowship. Their list is familiar: the work of apostles, prophesying, teaching, working miracles, healing, helping, the work of administrators, speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues (1 Corinthians 12, 13). They are all given not for individual exploitation but for the common good. Some of these gifts and functions are higher than others. In Corinth and in some churches today the gift of tongues or ecstatic speech is placed at the top as the supreme gift of the Spirit. Paul puts it well down the

list. "I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Corinthians 14:19). We are asked to desire earnestly the higher gifts (12:31) and to make love our aim (14:1). The great chapter on love is set in the center of this Corinthian problem of spiritual gifts. As they are exercised in love they make for the edification of the body. Thus they foster the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit and the gifts are ours."

The Fellowship and the Church

Such a fellowship given to men by God's own presence is the essential meaning of the church. It is not primarily an institution but a fellowship. The institution is for furthering the fellowship. It is the function of the fellowship, in turn, to animate the institution. When the church is regarded primarily as an institution or when it seeks to perpetuate itself as an institution it tends to become a barrier to fellowship. The church then fails in her mission. Judgment falls upon the church which fails to foster fellowship. But God's richest blessing is given when the church remembers her primary nature and mission. Let the church foster fellowship across racial and class barriers. Let there be twos and threes gathered together within her walls. Let grievances be forgiven and reconciliation be effective among her members. Let there be love and brotherhood and peace. The church is then the body of Christ, the household of God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I Will Build My Church

The word church is used in varied ways. It sometimes refers to public worship when we "attend church." It often refers to the building where worship is carried on. It is used in an institutional sense when we speak of church and state as parallel terms. Its primary reference is to a community of people. As we saw in the above chapter, it is essentially a fellowship. The word *church* comes from the Greek word *kuriakon,* meaning the Lord's house.[1] This word does not appear in the Bible. It refers primarily to the house of worship whereas the Biblical terms center specifically in the congregation. Among the many terms used we may note these familiar ones: *body of Christ* (Romans 12:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27); *brethren* (Romans 8:12); *ekklesia,* or *people of God* (1 Corinthians 1:2); *flock of God* (Acts 20:28); *the household of God* (Ephesians 2:19); *the Israel of God* (Galatians 6:16); *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people* (1 Peter 2:9).

The Origin of the Church

From the names mentioned above there is a clear rootage of the church in the Israel of the Old Testament. Indeed, the idea of a chosen people with a special mission can be seen in God's call to Abraham. "And I will make

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[1] Alan Richardson (ed.), *A Theological Wordbook of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), page 46. Cf. Middle English *chirche,* Scottish *kirk,* Dutch *kerk,* German *Kirche.*

of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing . . . ; and by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves" (Genesis 12:2, 3). This same pattern of a special community with a special mission is set forth in the Mosaic covenant at Sinai. "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5, 6a).

Israel was to be a people of God's own special possession. But it also had a special mission in the world. It was to be a kingdom of priests mediating God's blessings to the nations. Throughout Israel's history there was always the temptation and the tendency to accept God's special favors but to neglect the obligation of ministry to the nations. The prophets had to chide Israel for this neglect and to set God's call before them again. "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). Israel was faithless in this mission and calamity overtook the nation. They were carried into captivity and dispersed. But the hope of fulfillment still rested in a faithful remnant (Isaiah 10:20-22).

While this unfulfilled mission of Israel provides the framework and background of the church, the actual founding of the church was the creative and original work of Jesus Christ. He had to screen out false notions of glory and power. Current messianic expectations were rejected and he espoused the role of a servant. He undertook a mission of humility and loving service. He called people to a higher righteousness. He followed God's will into the

path of redemptive suffering and gave his life a ransom for many.

In the midst of this ministry he inaugurated a new movement centering in an inner fellowship of disciples. "And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons" (Mark 3:14, 15). Here was the nucleus of a new community. It had its own inner life in his fellowship—"to be with him." It had also its mission in the world—"to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons." This company of the friends of Jesus grew in maturity and understanding. They came to see that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God." This discerning insight was evoked by Jesus' questionings about who he was and it was voiced by Peter, the "key man" of the disciples. On the occasion of this confession Jesus declared his intention: "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:13-20).

The Roman Catholics regard this as the setting up of the institutional church with Peter as its chief cornerstone and authoritative head. Protestants have objected to this interpretation of the phrase, "upon this rock." They have argued that "this rock" referred to Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God," rather than to Peter himself. There is suggestive merit to Floyd Filson's idea that Jesus did indeed refer to Peter as the "key man" of the group and that he gave him special responsibilities of leadership of this early Christian community.[2] As a matter of historic fact it was Peter who led in choosing a successor to Judas among the Twelve. He preached boldly on Pentecost. He nerved the church to endure persecution.

But far more than on Peter or other leaders, and more

[2] *Pioneers of the Primitive Church* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1940), page 33.

than on Peter's confession or other valid beliefs, the church was established on the plinth, or base, of Jesus Christ himself. Christ was the chief cornerstone of the church. He was and is the magnetic center of the Christian fellowship. "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). The origin of the church centered in him and he brought it into being among his followers. He bound them to himself in the fellowship and symbols of their last supper together. He showed himself alive on the first Easter evening in the breaking of bread (Luke 24:28-35). He gave them a clear mission in the world under his authority and in his continuing presence (Matthew 28: 18-20). He promised them power to carry out this mission, and his promise was fulfilled on Pentecost. The church was founded by Christ and on Christ. This foundation is so solid and enduring that "the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

The Nature of the Church

If we seek to understand the nature of the church by specific definitions we note at once a wide variety of viewpoints. For the Roman Catholic the church is a "body of men united together by the profession of the same Christian faith and by participation in the sacraments, under governance of lawful pastors, more especially the Roman pontiff, the sole vicar of Christ on earth."[3] For the Eastern Orthodox the church is the worshiping community, the nation at prayer. "It is the mystical and sacramental unity of all believers, past, present, and future, with one another and with the only head of the church,

[3] W. A. Visser 't Hooft and J. H. Oldham, *The Church and Its Function in Society* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938), page 28.

Jesus Christ.[4] For the Anglicans the church is "the extension of the incarnation."[5] For the Lutherans the church is the congregation of saints in which the gospel is purely taught and the sacraments rightly administered.[6] The Reformed churches lay special emphasis on the invisible church which is "the society of those whom God has chosen to save, which cannot be fully perceived by our eyes."[7]

Simpler and more practical definitions may be given. "The church is the organized body of Christians who work together, as the members of a body, to promote the kingdom of God."[8] "The Church is the fellowship of the 'Saints' attached by bonds of devotion to their Lord and to one another."[9] "The Church . . . is where Christ is, living and reigning, in the midst of his gathered people."[10] "The Church is . . . God's community of discipleship, consisting of those who bear a vital personal faith-love relationship to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. . . . The church is the fellowship of 'sinners saved by grace' who are at once also 'the saints striving after holiness.' "[11] Such attempts to sharpen the nature of the church into a concise definition tend to be so general that they miss much of her concrete richness or they tend to be so specific on one point that they omit other important facets of her complex variety. It is helpful therefore to look at a series of bipolarities in the nature of the church.

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[4] *Ibid.*, page 34.

[5] *Ibid.*, page 38.

[6] *Ibid.*, pages 40, 41.

[7] *Ibid.*, page 49.

[8] D. W. Kurtz, *Studies in Doctrine* (Elgin: Brethren Publishing House, 1919), page 57.

[9] Warren W. Slabaugh in George W. Richards, *et al.*, *The Nature of the Church* (Chicago: Willett, Clark and Company, 1945), page 73.

[10] P. K. Regier, *et al.*, *The Believers' Church* (Newton, Kansas: General Conference Mennonite Church, 1955), page 7.

[11] *Ibid.*, pages 7, 8.

Some Bipolarities

The church is both divine and human. She is divine in that she is the people of God, the body of Christ, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. In all of these Biblical figures, it is clearly implied that God is in the midst of her. God's will is her standard of value and of behavior. Christ's redemptive work brought her into being. Christ is her bridegroom and her Lord. She is in this sense a holy community. By origin and by intention the church is not just another grouping of men for convenient purposes. She is the *ekklesia* or people of God, called out as his own household. She is holy in that forgiveness of sins and personal renewal provide the gateway to membership in her fellowship. She is holy in that her members are called to be perfect as God is perfect, to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness. They are to make love their aim, to put on love, to build up their corporate life in love. The church is holy in that she is the pillar and ground of truth. In all these ways the church is a divine fellowship. But she is also a human fellowship. She was inaugurated by Jesus Christ in the days of his flesh. Her members are holy only because their sins are forgiven by grace and her trespasses are not counted against her.

The church is human in that she needs constant renewal by confession, forgiveness, and forbearing love; in that she needs constant nurture and discipline for the perfecting of the saints. She is all too human when one reviews the record of the actual church. This is not peculiar to eras of apostasy or to congregations especially wretched in their condition. All the Christian groups described in the New Testament are laggards in love and under strain of weakness and waywardness. There is the constant need of correction, reform, reconciliation, and renewal. There are minimum standards to be maintained

and outer limits of tolerance beyond which a brother is "as a Gentile and a tax-collector" (Matthew 18:17). But all exclusive boundaries and all eras and areas of renewal leave the empirical church all too human.

Christian saints are people who, having received forgiving and enabling grace, are still in process of becoming saints. Both "the greatness and the wretchedness of the church" grow out of the fact that she is both a divine and a human fellowship. Human, all too human, indeed. But called to be saints, called out as a holy community, to be nurtured "to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

The church is a fellowship both unified and diverse. In essence the church is one because she is the "church of God." Even as a local congregation in Corinth she is not called the Corinthian church but "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1:2). The church is one in origin, in essence, and in destiny. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all" (Ephesians 4:4-6). As the body of Christ the church is one. As the bride of Christ she is one. "Is Christ divided?" (1 Corinthians 1:13). Amid all the diversities of location, type, maturity, organization, and practice, the church is essentially one.

The ecumenical movement is sustained by this basic and ancient doctrine of the unity of the church. This is also the one hope of unity in a divided world. We look elsewhere in vain for any adequate basis for world brotherhood. Here is a fabric of community which crosses racial, economic, and cultural lines. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither

male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

While the church is thus one in inner essence, she is also diverse and multiple in actuality. This is the case in the New Testament. There are many churches in terms of local congregations—the churches of Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:41), the churches in Judea (Galatians 1:22), the seven churches in Asia (Revelation 1:4). Churches differed also in type and temper. There were the Hebrews and the Hellenists in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-6). Filson suggests that these represented separate congregations with one centering at the temple using the Aramaic language and the other centering in a synagogue and using the Greek language.[12] There were churches of the uncircumcised Gentiles and churches of the circumcised Jews, and mixed congregations as in Antioch (Galatians 2:7-13).

This multiplicity was the sign of life and of growth. It was in fulfillment of the Great Commission and the mark of God's blessing on the church. It was the fruit of the "furtherance of the gospel." This variation in type and temper was also regarded as a good thing. The principle of diversity was regarded not as a compromise or as a concession to human frailty but as a special blessing from God. Varieties of gifts, of service, of working were all from God (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). There was no requirement of tailor-made uniformity in the New Testament churches. The variety was part of "the unsearchable riches of Christ" and "the manifold wisdom of God" (Ephesians 3:8-10).

When, however, this multiplicity and variety led to jealousy, divisiveness, and party strife, it was condemned. It was schism in the body and those who thus did not

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[12] *Op. cit.*, pages 69, 70.

discern the body were profaning the body and blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:17-27).

So it is in the churches today. The fact of multiplicity is a good thing and is a mark of vitality and growth. Let the churches be fruitful and multiply, in fulfillment of their mission. The principle of variety is also a good thing. There is no call for all churches to be monotonously alike. There is no sanction, however, for party strife, jealousy, or arrogance among churches. Let their variety be maintained in terms of mutual respect, co-operation, and special vocation in witness and in work.

The various families or groupings of churches are sometimes organized on a national or geographical basis. In many modern cases they are organized on the basis of common beliefs and polity. These groupings are usually called denominations. Sometimes the smaller ones are called sects, the term being used as a derogatory one because they are regarded as having cut themselves off from the body. Some form of naming or "denomination" is necessary to designate organized and active bodies. To name a church "Undenominational" is a contradiction in terms. To separate or cut oneself off for free functioning or a special vocation need not be derogatory. Often such special groups have a corner *of* the truth to which it is their vocation to bear witness. When they think they have a corner *on* the truth they are truly sectarian whether they are large churches or small ones. Bigotry and selfishness in such groups of churches are indeed a profaning of the body of Christ. The same is true of quarreling, rivalry, and slander among them. If, however, they regard themselves as branches of the larger vine or as members of the body, they can be used of God for special prophetic witness and for vigorous and devoted ministry. The church is thus both unified and diverse, one and many.

The church is a fellowship in the world but not of the world (John 17:16, 18). The church is in the world which God made and which he so loved that he gave his Son to save it. The church is a historic community set up by Jesus Christ in the days of his flesh. It began in Jerusalem and it has spread out to Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the world. Whatever we may think of the invisible church, the church we discover in the New Testament is very much visible—living epistles "to be known and read by all men" (2 Corinthians 3:2).

The church is sent into all the world with its great redemptive mission. It seeks to do God's will on earth as it is done in heaven. There is no *Weltflucht* or escape from life indicated in the Bible. The Christian community is an earthy and realistic group of people—it is *in* the world. But it is not *of* the world. It is a colony of heaven (Philippians 3:20). Its center of gravity is literally out of this world. Its origin is from heaven. Its object of devotion and its goal of endeavor are in heaven. Its ultimate destiny is in heaven.

On the basis of this duality the church is both an inclusive and an exclusive fellowship.

It is inclusive in its concern for all men in all their need. All men are brethren for whom Christ died. It is inclusive in its prophetic and evangelistic mission—into all the world. It is inclusive in that it includes in its membership men from every class and tongue and race. It is inclusive in that its members vary widely in maturity and saintliness. All are saved by grace and are still unprofitable servants.

It is exclusive in that it is a community of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of the church. Those who do not own him as Savior and Lord are excluded. "Anyone

who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Romans 8:9). A man is not included on the basis of his natural birth but on the basis of his spiritual rebirth. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

It is exclusive in that its members are to be earnest disciples of Christ. "He who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:38). This call to discipleship is the basis of the principle of separatism. "What partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial?" (2 Corinthians 6:14, 15). This call to discipleship is also the basis of church discipline. The church is to labor for the upbuilding of its members, speaking the truth in love.

It is exclusive in that it witnesses against evil. In drawing the line between the church and the world, some churches have been quite inclusive and have regarded the church as containing the whole community, as in the state church. They may have drawn a line between "Christendom" and, say, "heathendom" or the Moslem world. But within their own Christian nation all persons were baptized into the church as infants. The "world" was at most a name for the sinful tendencies of the people.

Other churches have been quite exclusive and have limited their membership to "believers." They have regarded infant baptism as insufficient and have required rebaptism of those who had been baptized in infancy (hence the words *Anabaptist* and *Wiedertäufer).* These "gathered" churches have usually set high standards of Christian behavior for their members and have required a large degree of conformity. They have lifted up the call to discipleship in the rigorous terms set by Jesus Christ himself (Mark 8:34). This puts loyalty to Christ above all

other loyalties however high and calls for sacrifice and risk of persecution. The church, in this view, is against the world. It has walls. "This Christian Puritanism is no abstract theory of life, founded on a narrow theology, but is born of a realistic sense of the value of individual human lives."[13]

This position is not taken for the sole purpose of keeping the church pure ("klein aber rein"). It is felt that the obscuring of the line between right and wrong weakens the church's redeeming power. Christian men who are unduly tolerant cannot bring other men where they themselves are.[14] In whatever manner the formal lines may be drawn around the Christian fellowship there should always be at the center of it a devoted core or faithful remnant who take the call to discipleship with high seriousness.

Others may be regarded as falling in concentric circles around them:[15] the ordinary Christians as a body of formal members; then a borderline group more or less informed by Christian beliefs and standards; and, beyond that, the non-Christian "world." These surrounding groups act both as insulators and as mediators between the inner core and the world. The faithful remnant should always offer both judgment and invitation to the others, maintaining a redemptive tension between the church and the world.

The Kingdom of God and the Church

The kingdom of God is best thought of in terms of the rule of God. The emphasis is on his kingship more than on a particular territory where he rules. In the Bible

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[13] R. H. Strachan, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper, 1935), page 5.

[14] *Ibid.*, page 6.

[15] This conception is taken from a lecture by Dr. John Coleman Bennett.

God is regarded as the sovereign ruler of all the world. His kingdom is everlasting (Psalm 145:13) as he rules with authority and power over the natural and the moral order. In this sense God's kingdom has always been established. The life of men and nations has always been within the framework of his kingly providence. His kingly rule is over them as eternal fact and standing claim. All we have said in earlier chapters about God's fatherly rule is the foundation of the kingdom doctrine. "Our Father who art in heaven. . . . Thine is the kingdom" (Matthew 6:9, 13).

The kingdom of God is also a kingdom which came to hand in the redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ, as we noted in earlier chapters. He inaugurated his work with the declaration, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). In the parallel text of Matthew 4:17, the term *kingdom of heaven* implies clearly that the two phrases are identical in meaning. Jesus identified his ministry of compassion as the coming to hand of the kingdom (Matthew 12:28; Luke 10:9). His kingdom is one of high character and of a call to righteous living (Matthew 5 and 6). His kingdom is at hand when men are born again from above (John 3:3, 5) and when they walk in the path of discipleship (Luke 9:57-62). The kingdom is at hand in the preaching of the Word (Luke 8:9-11) and in the establishment of the church (Matthew 16:19).

In all these ways Jesus Christ regarded his coming into the world as the inrush and coming of God's rule or kingdom. He came to call men to this kingdom.

> His was a call of tremendous urgency, a call to radical decision for that Kingdom. The Kingdom is *right there,* "at hand." It stands at the door and knocks (Luke 12:36, cf. Rev. 3:20). Who will open and let it in? Who will say *Yes* to its coming? . . . It

is a pearl of great price; you sell everything you have to get it (Matt. 13:45-46). You leave father and mother, wife and family, as if you hated them, at its beck (Luke 14:26). It transcends all earthly concerns (Matt. 6:33).[16]

The kingdom of God is also a kingdom or rule to come more fully in the future. It is a major element in the doctrine of last things, in eschatology. We shall explore these matters further in the last chapter. The concern of the present is to clarify the doctrine of the kingdom so as to see its relation to the church. For some persons there is a complete identification between the church and the kingdom of God on earth; or, rather, an exaltation of the church to the exclusion of the kingdom. This is the view of Augustine's classic, *The City of God.* For eleven hundred years Catholic thought was unchallenged in its assumption that the church represented completely the rule of God on earth. Christendom was called *Corpus Christianum,* and the whole society, under the church's protection, was God's rule on earth. Protestant thought takes issue with this view and, following Jesus and the prophets, sees grave danger in thus exalting the organized institution of the church.

> The church that makes such an identification will soon begin to invite God to endorse its own very human policies and practices, will equate the people of God with those nice people who share its particular beliefs and participate in its services, and will reckon the advance of the Kingdom in terms of its numerical growth. But it will not be the New Testament church! Such identification is a great snare, as prophets since Amos have told us.[17]

There is an opposite tendency to exalt the kingdom to the minimizing or exclusion of the church. This has been a mark of social-gospel thought.

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[16] John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1935), page 219.

[17] *Ibid.,* page 236.

> The Church is primarily a fellowship for worship; the Kingdom is a fellowship of righteousness. . . . The Kingdom of God breeds prophets; the Church breeds priests and theologians. The Church runs to tradition and dogma; the Kingdom rejoices in forecasts and boundless horizons. . . . The Church is one social institution along side of the family, the industrial organization of society, and the State. The Kingdom of God is in all these, and realizes itself through them all. . . . The Church is indispensable to the religious education of humanity and to the conservation of religion, but the greatest future awaits religion in the public life of humanity.[18]

As some forms of social-gospel thought thus minimize the church by pushing the kingdom mainly out into the broader life of society, so likewise some forms of premillennial thought do it by pushing the kingdom entirely into the future.

> The Christian Church is . . . distinct from the Kingdom which is to follow it. The Church is a companion of Christ in his humiliation, manifesting his sufferings and filling up the afflictions which are behind. The Kingdom is the manifestation of the glory of Christ which shall follow.[19]

Such efforts to make complete separation between the kingdom age and the gospel age or church age disregard the clear implications of the New Testament as to their integral relationship, although they rightly discern that the kingdom is greater than the church.

How then is the church related to the kingdom? She has a positive relation to the kingdom, yet she is not the kingdom without qualification. God surely rules beyond the confines of the church. Moreover, there is obviously much in the organized church which comes under judgment of the kingdom. But despite quarrels, defects, and weaknesses, the church is a major instrument for advancing

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[18] Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), pages 134, 137, 145. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

[19] W. E. Blackstone, *Jesus Is Coming* (New York: Revell, 1898), page 83. See also page 137.

the kingdom. The church is the major carrier of the kingdom's judgment upon society, for hers is the Spirit and the gifts, hers is the Bible and the witness of the Word, hers is the commission to be a light to the world and to be the salt of the earth. She is a colony of heaven. She is an earnest or down payment on the kingdom. She is happily called the capital of the kingdom.[20] As such she is the central focus of God's redemptive rule on earth. This is not to arrogate to herself special privileges or perfection but to acknowledge the tension she herself experiences between what she is and what she ought to be. It is to discern her double function in the world: to nurture her own inner life as the bride of Christ and to fulfill her mission in the world as the body of Christ.

[20] Walter Marshall Horton's phrase. See "The Kingdom of God and the Church," in *Christendom*, Chicago, spring 1941, pages 321ff.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Bride of Christ and the Body of Christ

We move now from the origin and the nature of the church to a consideration of her functions and her tasks in terms of the two classic metaphors of the bride of Christ and the body of Christ. In this discussion we deal with matters of intense present-day concern and of wide difference of opinion even among dedicated Christians. Let us explore these problems, "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" even though we may not yet have attained "unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Ephesians 4:3, 13).

The Inner Life of the Church

For many years now it has been customary to interpret the history of the church in terms of environmental factors. Outside events and influences are used as explanations of what happened in and to the church. The rise of Christianity is ascribed to Roman unification and religious toleration. The Crusades were due to the Moslem control of the Holy Sepulchre. Modern missions are explained as the religious phase of colonialism. Revivals are regarded as the natural result of frontier restlessness and insecurity. The rise of denominations is traced to social and economic sources. The explanatory thread of church life is the industrial revolution. So the arguments run, entirely in terms of environmental factors.

These analyses are impressive indeed, and they add much to the understanding of church history. But these

factors do not furnish a complete explanation of events. In every case something else has been present—the forces and influences of the church's inner life. The Jerusalem Christians went everywhere preaching the Word not merely because they were scattered abroad (Acts 8:1). The gospel was already like a live coal in their hands and they were eager to pass it on. They bubbled with the good news like a child with a secret. Their radiance was not the reflection of light about them—as cat-eyes or road warnings shine back to our automobiles at night. Their radiance was from an incandescent fire within them which flamed up and illuminated their whole darkened world.

Here is a paragraph from Lynn D. White of Mills College which gives a discerning picture of the interplay of outer and inner forces:

> The river of the Christian tradition, rising in the hills of antiquity, flows down to the modern world through broken country. Sometimes it is disturbed by rapids, sometimes serene, often muddied, often clear, receiving tributaries, gaining much, losing little, seemingly guided by the terrain through which it passes, yet, propelled by its own forces, in no small part responsible for the forms of the landscape.[1]

It is important to recover this emphasis upon inner life because we are under constant strain today to judge the church chiefly from some standards other than her own, and to seek strength and resources outside of her own characteristic center of power.

The inner life of the church is also minimized by confusion about means and ends. A prominent minister argued a generation ago that the church should have no concern for herself as an end.[2] She should, rather, forget

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[1] George Thomas (ed.), *The Vitality of the Christian Tradition* (New York: Harper, 1945), page 88.

[2] Ernest F. Tittle, *What Must the Church Do to Be Saved?* (New York, Cincinnati, The Abingdon Press, 1921).

herself in service to a needy world. "For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:35).

This profound truth is indeed a strong judgment against all the self-protection and pride which infect church bodies, whether large or small. The church is called to sacrificial service and self-effacing witness in a wayward and needy world. She is a means, an instrument, an agency for something and Someone beyond herself. But that does not rule her out as also an end. Indeed, the church is explicitly viewed as the object of Christ's love and concern in St. Paul's exhortation that husbands love their wives "as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

Lesslie Newbigin enters his protest against the completely functional view of the church in these discerning words:

> The Church is both a means and an end, because it is a foretaste. It is the community of the Holy Spirit who is the earnest of our inheritance. The Church can only witness to that inheritance because her life is a *real* foretaste of it, a real participation in the life of God Himself. Thus worship and fellowship, offering up praise and adoration to God, receiving His grace, rejoicing in Him, sharing one with another the fruits of the Spirit, and building up one another in love are all essentials to the life of the Church. . . . It is precisely because she is not *merely* instrumental that she can be instrumental.[3]

With this general perspective of the inner life of the church we have clearer warrant to consider the familiar but important features and functions of it.

Worship

The central feature and function of the church's inner life is the worship of God. The church is saved from

[3] *The Household of God* (New York: Friendship Press, 1954), pages 168, 169.

self-centeredness because God is the center of her inner life. It is the essence of worship to be an encounter with God. Praise, adoration, and thanksgiving are all outflowing exercises even though they take place in the inner life of the church. The hymns and the liturgy of the church are rich resources for fixing the mind and the affections upon him. The church at prayer is most characteristically the bride of Christ.

The sacraments fit into this exercise of worship. They are aspects and forms of worship. The word *sacrament* is sometimes used with very broad meaning such as when we regard our world as "a sacramental universe." When we sing "In the rustling grass I hear Him pass, He speaks to me everywhere," we are finding nature herself a means of grace, awakening in us the sense of God's presence. This mood has Biblical warrant in such a statement as Romans 1:20: "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made."

Frequently *sacrament* is used also for any rite or practice which nurtures the spiritual life of the Christian and reference is made to the sacrament of daily toil, the sacrament of silence, the sacrament of prayer, the sacrament of home life, or the sacrament of friendship. More strictly, however, the term is reserved for rites closely related to Christ's redeeming work and to his own authority. The traditional view is given in the Anglican catechism as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given to us, ordained by Christ himself; as a means whereby we receive this grace, and a pledge to assure us thereof." Dr. Harner defines a sacrament more simply as "a sacred and symbolic act, traceable to Jesus, which sets forth in an object lesson great truths of our

Christian faith."[4] The sacraments are called the means of grace, not because they work automatically regardless of the attitudes of the participants, but because they symbolize and make vivid the great facts of the gospel. Some groups like the Quakers and the Salvation Army discard all the sacraments, although they have their own distinctive forms of worship. Some groups have used the word *ordinances* and have laid great emphasis upon the value of New Testament rites, including such practices as feet-washing and anointing with oil for healing. The Roman Catholics claim that there are seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, penance, extreme unction, holy orders, and matrimony. Most Protestants agree on two as essential: baptism and the eucharist or the Lord's supper; but there is wide difference among them as to their practice.

Baptism is a rite of cleansing at the beginning of the Christian life and it is also a rite of initiation into Christ's body, the church. The word *baptize* means to dip or to immerse, and the ceremony is for the remission and forgiveness of sins. It is to be given to those who repent of their sins (Acts 2:38) and who believe the gospel (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12; 18:8). It celebrates the applicant's own experience of rebirth and personal commitment to Christian discipleship (John 3:5; Matthew 28:19). This is why Baptist groups emphasize believer's baptism and regard infant baptism as inadequate. Churches which practice infant baptism recognize the same point in their ceremony of confirmation.

The threefold formula in baptism is based, not on the hypothesis that three immersions will be more cleansing than one, but rather upon the fullness of the

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[4] Nevin C. Harner, *I Believe* (Philadelphia: Christian Education Press, 1954), page 66.

Christian conception of God and upon the fullness of his redemptive work in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. Christian baptism is in the name of him in whom dwelt the fullness of the Godhead. Some churches set forth this fullness by the threefold formula of words alone. Others set it forth by three complete immersions in the baptismal water. Thus in the baptismal formula, as in the apostolic benediction, the full wealth of the Christian faith is brought to significant focus.

The other sacrament which most Christians practice in their worship is the communion. It is given various names: *eucharist,* because it is the high point of thanksgiving and praise; *the Lord's supper,* because it was instituted at Christ's last supper with his disciples, and because it is so called in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 11:20): *love feast,* because of the New Testament practice and explicit reference (Jude 12); and *holy communion,* because of its divine reference and the sacred intimacy of the believer's participation.

In this rite also there is wide variation of practice. Many churches celebrate it with only the emblems of the bread and the cup. Some, like the Church of the Brethren, attempt to preserve in fullest similitude the last supper of our Lord (John 13).[5] They engage in feet-washing as a preparatory rite of love humbling itself in service. This is followed by a fellowship meal in celebration of the unity of Christian believers as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:17). The climax of the service is the central act of worship by the ritual of the bread and the cup. The meaning of the communion is quite beyond words as it lifts up for celebration God's saving act in Christ's sacrificial death. It is a rite with a backward look: "Do

[5] See the author's pamphlet, *The Brethren Love Feast* (Elgin: Brethren Publishing House, 1943).

this in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24). It is a rite with a forward look: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). But it is primarily a rite of the living experience of Christ's own presence in the believer's heart and in the midst of the fellowship of love.

The real presence is not to be explained by a theory of transubstantiation or to be brought about by priestly manipulation. But the world over and the ages through, the living Lord has been known to Christians "in the breaking of bread" (Luke 24:35); and drinking "the cup of the new covenant" has indeed furthered participation in the redemption by Christ's blood (1 Corinthians 11:25). This is the central act of Christian worship and it is at the heart of the inner life of the church. It is a means of grace.

> Bread of the world, in mercy broken,
> Wine of the soul, in mercy shed,
> By whom the words of life were spoken,
> And in whose death our sins are dead.
>
> Look on the heart by sorrow broken,
> Look on the tears by sinners shed;
> And be Thy feast to us the token
> That by Thy grace our souls are fed.[6]

There are other rites and practices like marriage, ordination by the laying on of hands, and anointing with oil for healing which are not usually included in the list of sacraments. That they are means of grace with a long usage is, however, beyond question.

A word is in place on anointing with oil for healing. This is a practice in some churches and it is based on the healing ministry of Jesus and on such New Testament

[6] Reginald Heber's hymn.

references as Mark 6:13 and especially James 5:14-16. In this rite the anointing with oil is accompanied by the laying on of hands and prayer, all three of which are directed toward a special enduement of the Holy Spirit. The ends sought are the forgiveness of sins, the strengthening of faith, and the healing of the body. Here, as in other experiences of the Holy Spirit, it is assumed that special blessing is given in addition to, not instead of, the usual natural processes. Churches which have followed this practice bear testimony to its significance and help in many cases of healing. A wider practice of this rite would surely be a benefit to many. The present-day knowledge of mental illness and of psychosomatic healing makes this rite one of fresh relevance.[7]

Fellowship

Another feature of the inner life of the church is fellowship. We have already seen in the chapters above that the essence of the church is fellowship—the fellowship among Christian people produced by the Holy Spirit's presence in their midst. Fellowship and group consciousness at this high and divine level are not merely means to an end. They are themselves also the fulfillment of man's deep need of love. "At each stage of the apostolic task," writes Lesslie Newbigin, "the Church's task is to reconcile men to God in Christ. She can only do that insofar as she is herself living in Christ, a reconciled fellowship in Him, bound together in the love of the Father. This life in Christ is not merely the instrument of the apostolic mission, it is also its end and purpose."[8]

In this fellowship the individual Christian finds the

[7] See pamphlet by Warren D. Bowman, *Anointing for Healing* (Elgin: Brethren Publishing House, 1942).

[8] *Op. cit.*, page 169.

fullest development of his spiritual stature. Without violating his freedom or his privacy, the church must give pastoral care to each member so that he is nurtured in all areas of his life—body, mind, and spirit. Old and young, men and women, rich and poor, strong and weak, and persons of all types and temperaments are to realize in the fellowship of the church their fullest spiritual stature.

This fellowship is something which cannot be given to men outside of the church. They must participate in her inner life to share it. They seek it elsewhere in vain. They can carry the flavor and sustaining power of this fellowship with them into all their other social relationships, whether in home, neighborhood, school, business, industry, state, or nation. But none of these can replace the fellowship of the church.

The Ministry of the Word

According to the Reformers' definition mentioned earlier, the church exists where the gospel is purely taught and the sacraments rightly administered. This emphasis on the Word and the gospel is a characteristic feature of Protestantism. It puts the Bible in the midst of the church. It involves both teaching and preaching. We shall see later that both teaching and preaching are to be directed to the outsider. But they also have a function in the inner life of the church. Instruction in Christian belief and ethics is necessary for a true and significant Christian life. The church lives by such clear understanding. The church is concerned also in general education so that the wide range of culture, arts, and skills can be learned in the framework of Christian philosophy and can be governed by Christian motivation. Preaching, more especially, includes moral and spiritual exhortation and

the proclamation of the gospel of "Christ and him crucified." Indeed, such preaching is far more than setting forth ideas. It is setting forth "truth through personality."[9] It is a celebration of the saving events of the gospel and, in this regard, it is closely akin to the sacraments.[10]

Authority

This is a matter of much confusion in thought about the church. Some persons object to authority in the name of a religion of the spirit and set up a false antithesis between them. Not every enthusiasm or sentiment, however, is of the Spirit of God. The earlier comments about "ardor and order" apply on this point. The religion of the Holy Spirit of God and of the Spirit of Christ is one of authority other than a person's own subjective states. There is objection to authority, likewise, in the name of individual freedom and of persuasion as against group demands which might become coercive and despotic. George Stewart has drawn a useful distinction between two meanings of authority.

> Authority may mean either *auctoritas,* a commanding influence, or *potestas,* dogmatic prescriptive power. Authority in the Church as far as it relates to the truth is *auctoritas.* It should mean nothing despotic; rather it should mean something reasonable and helpful—namely, respect for responsible statements and requirements laid down by accredited representatives of the Church whose experience and knowledge have given them a position akin to that of authorities in any other field.[11]

This authority is the authority of truth and, for Christians, this centers in the revealed truth of the gospel

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[9] Phillips Brooks' phrase.

[10] See Henry Sloan Coffin, *Communion Through Preaching* (New York: Scribners, 1952), *passim,* in which he speaks of preaching as "the monstrance of the gospel."

[11] *The Church* (New York: Association Press, 1938), page 31.

as embodied and set forth in Jesus Christ himself. The church as a whole as well as the individual himself stands under the claim and influence of this authority. It is the authority of love as the members "have the same care for one another" (1 Corinthians 12:25). In the life of fellowship, individual freedom is tempered by the requirements and deference of love—by "discerning the body" (1 Corinthians 11:29). It is a mark of maturity to understand and to exercise the authority of "truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15, 16). The ethical and moral authority of the church is akin to her authority of truth. Both the church as a whole and the individual Christian are under the claims of discipleship. The body and the members are under the authority of the head, which is Christ.

As in any ordered fellowship, the exercise of this moral authority involves discipline. On occasion the lone individual makes his prophetic witness and calls the church to order. On other occasions, because of wider experience and responsibility, the church calls the individual member to order. The eighteenth chapter of Matthew gives the steps of a normative procedure. Bishop Charles Gore writes discerningly about the authority of the church for discipline:

> It is the church's duty to declare the message of God and to. . . refuse to reduce it. It may be its duty to judge and to excommunicate this or that individual or group. But this is to leave them to God — not to profess to pass the final sentence on them. . . . It has got authority to bear a certain witness. It is set to administer a covenant of redemption or salvation. It must let men know the warrant by which it speaks and acts. But it can pronounce no final sentence. It has no authority to draw up any list of the lost or any infallible catalogue of saints. The day of judgment, we are assured, will be a day of surprises, and we are to "judge nothing before the time."[12]

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[12] *The Holy Spirit and the Church* (New York: Scribners, 1924), pages 30, 31.

The Ministry and Leaders in the Church

There are two opposite tendencies in interpreting historical movements and the life of social groups. One is to stress the force of circumstances and the spirit of the times and to minimize the significance of great personalities and the power of their leadership. Thus the Elizabethan era is regarded as having produced Shakespeare; the American revolution as having produced George Washington; or the Quaker movement as having produced William Penn. We say that no man is indispensable, for another will rise up from the people to take his place. In this mood, leaders are often regarded as "brass hats" and "big shots" and they furnish topics for endless gossip and frequent ridicule.

The other tendency is to exalt leadership overmuch. History is regarded as the lengthened shadow cast by great personalities. Alexander is thus regarded as having Hellenized the ancient world; Paul, as having spread Christianity around the Mediterranean; Luther, as having produced the Reformation.

A balanced view reckons with both of these tendencies and in the Bible they are both set in the framework of God's providence. Events and circumstances are regarded as "the fullness of times" (Galatians 4:4, King James Version), "allotted periods" (Acts 17:26), and as being within God's foreknowledge and, in some real sense, amenable to his eternal purpose (Romans 8:28ff.).

At the same time the leaders of movements are regarded as being raised up and appointed by God himself for specific assignments. Accordingly, within the church of Christ there has always been a recognized place for leadership and for some stated office of ministry. When we look at the New Testament record this is made clear.

It is difficult, however, to find any uniform or authoritative pattern of such leadership or offices.

Some Familiar Terms

There were apostles. *Apostle* was a Greek word meaning sent out and is equivalent to the Latin word from which we get *missionary*. They were first appointed by Christ from among his disciples, as a group of twelve "to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons" (Mark 3:14, 15). After his death and resurrection, the vacancy left by the defection and death of Judas was filled by Matthias. The qualifications stated for the office were that the candidate was with the disciples of the Lord Jesus from the beginning and that he was a witness of the resurrection. This would imply that the office would not continue beyond the original group of the Twelve. Paul, Barnabas, and James are also referred to as apostles (Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Corinthians 9:1) or as exercising apostolic authority (Acts 15:13; Galatians 2:9). After Paul's time, the title was restricted to the Twelve and Paul.

There were leaders called elders, the word *elder* being an ancient title referring to the age and maturity often regarded as essential to leadership. It is reflected in the Arabic title *sheikh* and the Greek term *presbyter,* each of which has the same meaning of being older. In the Jerusalem church there were apostles and elders (Acts 15:4, 6, 22, 23). In the Gentile churches Paul usually appointed elders to take charge of the newly planted congregations (Acts 14:23; 20:28). Elders were in spiritual charge of the church according to the instructions for anointing and prayer for healing (James 5:14). They were guardians of the flock, responsible for its nurture and for its protection (Acts 20:17-35). Dr. John Knox regards

the body of elders as of great importance in the primitive church. It appears to have been taken over from the Jewish sanhedrin and synagogue. He thinks that the selection of the Seven in Acts 6:1-6 was to enlarge the council of elders to give representation to the Jewish Christians of Hellenistic origin. "These boards of elders, like the Jewish sanhedrins, had general oversight of the affairs of the congregation and were responsible for guiding and ruling it."[18]

There were bishops also. The word *bishop* comes from the Greek word for overseer, which is *episkopos.* It is similar to the Latin word from which we get *superintendent* and *supervisor.* It is clearly the basis for *episcopal* and *episcopacy.* Bishops are mentioned in Philippians 1:1 along with deacons. The same word *(episkopoi)* is used for the elders of Ephesus as guardians of the flock (Acts 20:28). The requirements of the office of bishop stated in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 refer primarily to his moral character. The office of bishop and that of elder seem to be identical in Titus 1:5-9. There is little indication of a centralized bishop's office in the New Testament church. The "monarchical episcopate" is a later development. Later ecclesiastical tradition makes James the first bishop of Jerusalem and Peter of Rome.

There were deacons. The word *deacon* comes from the Greek word *diakonos,* which means servant or minister. This office is mentioned in Philippians 1:1. It is foreshadowed, although not mentioned as an office, in the appointment of the Seven in Acts, chapter 6. In the Pastoral Epistles the deacons are clearly church officials with requirements and duties similar to those of deacons in many evangelical churches today (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

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[18] H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams (eds.), *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives* (New York: Harper, 1956), pages 20-22.

There were prophets in the church. The gift of prophecy is mentioned second in Paul's list (1 Corinthians 12:28), although he is more concerned with functions than with church offices as such. He describes the meaning of prophecy as "upbuilding and encouragement and consolation" (14:3), which is quite similar to inspired preaching. Emotion is, however, not the main test of inspiration. Such preaching must be consistent with the gospel and the general faith of the church (1 Corinthians 12:3; 1 John 4:1-3).

There were teachers in the church, although they too are more specifically mentioned in connection with a function than with an identifiable office. The apostles were authorized to preach and to teach (Mark 6:15; Matthew 28:20). The Jerusalem church was devoted "to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). There were teachers in Antioch (Acts 13:1) and the office of teacher was included in several lists (1 Corinthians 12:28f.; Ephesians 4:11; Romans 12:7). This office of teacher had the prestige and the precedent of Jesus Christ himself; and Christianity, like Judaism, has always been a teaching religion. Christian converts require instruction in the practical duties of the Christian life, grounding in the Scriptures, and answers to their questions about the Christian faith.

The word *pastor* is used in Ephesians 4:11 but it does not seem to refer to a designated common office. It is an excellent term meaning shepherd and is thus one of high religious significance in the Old Testament (Psalm 23:1; Jeremiah 3:15; etc.) and in the New Testament. Jesus Christ is the good shepherd (John 10:14); and the elders in the church are to tend the flock of God under him as the chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-4). This function came later to be one of the characteristic offices of the Christian min-

istry. Dr. Kenneth S. Latourette regards it as the most significant office for it is given to "the care of individuals, with the ideal of loving, self-forgetful effort to win them to what the Christian conceives as the highest life and to help them grow in it."[14]

These are the main forms of the ministry in the New Testament church. They enabled the leaders to fulfill needed forms of service for the nurture of the inner life of the church. The picture is a varied and changing one. It does not appear, therefore, that they were set in a form divinely ordained once for all. There are diversities of gifts from the same Spirit.

As we look at the church today we see a tendency to exalt the ministry as an office. There is a "high church" view which puts the authority of the church in the hands of the clergy. They receive this authority, not through the church but through an unbroken line of "apostolic succession" from Jesus Christ to Peter and the other apostles and from them through the office of bishop to the present ministry properly ordained by the bishops. Such a polity makes for a unified functioning of the churches. It is often effective in maintaining continuity of teaching, in opposing error and political encroachment, and in promoting an organized Christian program. It is beset, however, by its own dangers of authoritarianism and formalism, and the temptations of institutional power. It runs into the twin perils of clericalism: that the clergy assume a proprietary right in their calling and tend to abuse their power; and that the lay members turn over to a priestly class the work which should be shared by all.[15]

There is an opposite tendency to minimize the

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[14] *The First Five Centuries* (New York: Scribners, 1937), page 252.

[15] See George Stewart, *op. cit.*, page 55.

ministry as an office. This "low church" view emphasizes the priesthood of all believers. In its extreme form it is opposed to all offices and expects the church to function entirely by the direct working of the Spirit through the lay membership. This polity makes for spontaneity and freedom and often evokes wide participation in the church's witness and work. Such churches are often marked by vitality, adaptability, and growth and bear testimony to the renewing power of the gospel. They are, however, often marked also by confusion, overlapping programs, self-appointed leaders not amenable to the disciplines of fellowship and order, divisiveness, and susceptibility to fads and cults.

Some Summarizing Statements

The health of the church is fostered by an adequate ministry and by acknowledged officers with stated qualifications and responsibility, as well as by the direct movement of the Spirit and the free activity of the total membership.

God uses a wide variety of men in the ministry of the church. They may differ in type and temperament as well as in training, and still be used effectively.

Some form of special training and preparation is required. Whether in the informal school of Christ, as in the case of Peter, or in the formal school of Gamaliel, as with Paul, there is a call to study and show oneself approved unto God and to become a workman who has no need to be ashamed (2 Timothy 2:15). There is accordingly a call for laborers and for a program of recruitment and training to prepare them for the work of the harvest which is already white (Luke 10:2).

There is no substitute for good character and for true devotion to the work of the ministry. Both sincerity and

circumspect behavior are required "so that no fault may be found with our ministry" (2 Corinthians 6:3).

A minister is ordained by both heaven and earth. A true minister should have a sense of God's own personal call to the work and should preach from his own personal conviction of truth. There is wisdom also in the call of the church and added power in her ordination and sanction.

It is right that ministers be supported financially. This is done so that they can give their full time and energy to their ministry, and not because they have gospel wares to sell. They should not work for money but for the gospel's sake, lest they be hirelings. But a laborer deserves his wages (Luke 10:7) and "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:14).

Formal offices enhance rather than diminish the importance of the laity. The main body of the church is made up of laymembers. A church composed entirely of formal officers would be self-defeating. A leader, by logic, functions only as he has followers. A minister serves only as he has someone to serve. A shepherd belongs to the flock. This division of labor involves variety of function but not gradation of rank. "You have one teacher, and you are all brethren" (Matthew 23:8). Though Paul was "not at all inferior to these superlative apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:5; 12:11) he still remained "our beloved brother Paul" (2 Peter 3:15). The laity of the church as well as the official ministry belongs to the priesthood of all believers. This does not mean that each one is self-sufficient and independent in his own religious life, nor is it a device to satisfy everyone's ego, but it means rather that the work of the ministry is so wide and so urgent that it will take a whole kingdom of priests to fulfill it.

The Outreach of the Church

We have had a look at the inner life of the church and the joyous and fruitful dimensions of her existence as the bride of Christ. We need to consider also her tasks and functions as the body of Christ. She has an outreach and mission beyond herself. She is a means as well as an end. The church is apostolic in the sense that she has this mission to the world. While she is not *of* the world, she is *in* the world in fact and *for* the world in intention. The church and the world are distinguishable and there is a call to separatism from the world. But this is not to sever all relations between them. The relationship between the church and the world has been complex and varied.

Ernest F. Tittle lists the following historic attitudes of the church: (1) Indifference to the world, for Christian citizenship is in heaven. The early Christians thought little of social reform, yet they did repudiate brutal games and war and they embodied love in their own fellowship. (2) Retreat from the world in the monastic seclusion of the religious orders. (3) Dominance of church control over all of existence as asserted by the medieval papacy. (4) Passive acceptance of worldly control and political conditions as a punishment for sin, as implied in the Lutheran view of the two separate kingdoms of the state and of the church. (5) Search for voluntary religious communities embodying *agapé* love, as in the Protestant left-wing sects. (6) Attempt to embody the mind of Christ in social institutions, as in the modern social gospel emphasis.[16]

A more recent classification in terms of the relationship of Christ to culture has been set forth by H. Richard

[16] *Christians in an Un-Christian Society* (New York: Association Press, 1939), pages 13ff.

Niebuhr.[17] He points out five main patterns of relationship: Christ in opposition to culture; Christ in accommodation to culture; Christ as transcending culture but with some synthesis; Christ and culture in paradox and polarity; and Christ as the transformer of culture.

Each of these two lists suggests the wide range and complications of the possible relationships between the church and the world. That there is actual relationship is inherent in the fact that Christians live perforce in the world and human life involves participation in culture. It is not possible for a Christian to follow Tertullian's advice to "resign from the population." Paul, who lifts up clearly the case for separatism (2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1), acknowledges that for complete separatism "you would need to go out of the world" (1 Corinthians 5:10). While the church has walls, there are windows and doors in it also for communication to pass through. Let us look at the major lines of outreach.

Witness and Concern

Before the church needs to *do* anything it reaches out to the world by what it *is* in its own inner life. "A city set on a hill cannot be hid" (Matthew 5:14). If the church is true to herself in her own inner life, she is a light to the world. She is a rebuke to the world's evil and an object for the world's hope. She is the salt of the earth. The ancient Epistle to Diognetus, written in the second century, said a similar thing: "What the soul is in the body Christians are in the world. . . . The soul is enclosed in the body, and itself holds the body together; so too Christians are held fast in the world as in a prison, yet it is they who hold the world together."

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[17] *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951).

This witness is not exercised in complete withdrawal or indifference, for the church, if true to herself, carries a deep concern for the world. She worships God, who has created the world and called it good and who has made of one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth. Every man on earth is the brother for whom Christ died. In loving one's neighbor as oneself, every Christian is bound to include the remotest man on earth as his neighbor. The church is thus driven by the terms of her worship to reach out in concern beyond her borders. Moreover, the members of the church are enmeshed in the world's work and life. As they come to worship they bring the needs and anxieties of the world with them. No retreat is exclusive enough to still the voice of concern.

Accordingly the church reaches out from the heart of her inner life in prayer and concern for the world about her. Prayer for magistrates and all who are in high position is open to all, and Christians omit it at their peril. Intercession can break through iron curtains and prison walls and bring God's grace to bear anywhere and at any time. According to Kierkegaard, "the Archimedean point outside the world is the little chamber where the true suppliant prays in all sincerity—where he lifts the world off its hinges." Prayer is often considered as the last resort of the church. It should also be the first and constant resort. Let not all the fevered claim of activism and the seeming impotence of the church stifle this most characteristic form of outreach. Even in her inner life the church has the world on her heart.

Evangelism

The task of evangelism starts with Jesus' own ministry and the work of his disciples as they learned to be fishers

of men. It was laid on them as a permanent assignment in the Great Commission. It was furthered on Pentecost with new power and by bold preaching. Imprisonment and forced flight from Jerusalem served only to multiply its effectiveness. The daring strategy and lifetime devotion of Paul and other preachers as well as the irrepressible testimony of many Christians in the common walks of life pursued this mission to the borders of the empire and beyond.

It is still an urgent task because it brings the power of the gospel to bear on the central and deep needs of men for the forgiveness of their sins. It is urgent to keep the church going and growing. All other functions of the church depend upon a continuous augmenting of church membership. It is urgent because the Great Commission still rests upon us unfulfilled. Though half the world's population may have come under the influence of the gospel, the other half is still living "B.C." Moreover, each new generation requires the work of evangelism to be repeated for it by both preaching and nurture. The goal of evangelism is the renewal of life by which men enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). There are specialists at this work whom God raises up periodically. But the priesthood of all believers involves every Christian in doing "the work of an evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:5).

While this work of evangelism is an outreach of the church it is also an ingathering for the church. This is not, however, for the selfish purpose of swelling church membership. It is for the purpose of bringing the members into the inner life of the church to share the deep fellowship which is its essence. The richest blessings the church has for the world cannot be given except as men enter the life of the church and thus become part of the body of Christ. For this reason the church seeks to extend and

increase herself by establishing new fellowships around the world.

Ministry of Mercy

Following the work of Christ himself it is the task of the church to engage in works of mercy. His work as healer and helper as well as his matchless parables of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), the last judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), and other teachings have burned this responsibility deeply into the Christian conscience. The outflow of *agapé* love is at the center of the church's outreach. It is occasioned by suffering and need wherever found. The main motive for it is compassion. Other implications flow from such service but it requires no other warrant than need and compassionate help.

While men have clear and immediate obligations to those in their own homes and neighborhoods, the outreach of love includes the world in its concept of neighborhood. While the church has clear and immediate obligations to those of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10), she is bound also to do good to all men. Through the centuries, accordingly, the church has engaged in almsgiving and the ministry of healing. Modern scientific medicine has increased greatly her resources for this work and the missionary doctor has become a characteristic exemplar of Christian love as he carries on his heroic work. In recent decades, the dislocations and destruction caused by war, as well as the glaring differences between areas of want and areas of plenty, have increased the occasions and the urgency of exercising this ministry of mercy. If many people outside of the church appear to do similar work on a broad humanitarian basis, this is partly due to diffused Christian motivation. In any case it calls the church all

the more to follow her Lord, who "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38) and whose voice can be heard saying, "What more are you doing than others?" (Matthew 5:47).

Education

The church has always been interested in education. The first purpose has been to instruct her own membership in the truths of the Christian faith and in the principles of Christian living. This is done for each oncoming generation and it is an adjunct of the evangelistic outreach of the church. Education is also for exploration into wider knowledge and for the increase of the abundant life of art and of technical skills. Such increase of knowledge is enriched and unified by the principles of the Christian revelation. This educational ministry flows out of the church as its fountain and seeks the health and enrichment of the common life. It should also strengthen and extend the church herself. Church-related colleges should maintain commendable standards of scholarship; they should be administered with integrity; and they should also be distinctively Christian in their teachings and in their general atmosphere. They thus have an important contribution to make to society.

Prophetic and Ethical Function

The church has a prophetic and ethical function to fulfill in her outreach. This is the task of making clear and convincing the principles of the kingdom of God according to the revelation of Christ. In the fields of politics and economics and in such social problems as family tension, race prejudice, and war, the church has the task of clarifying the principles by which men are to live. This includes the pronouncing of judgment on social

evils but even more effort is required to clarify and persuade in positive ways.

This ethical and social responsibility applies first of all to the church's own institutional life. Her main thrust beyond her borders is in terms of the behavior of her members in the vocations of the common life. The world needs a constant stream of convinced Christians to engage in her work, with the ethical discernment and conviction needed to apply Christian principles in the broad life of society. In many ways the Christian ethical claims apply primarily to Christians. They understand them better. They are committed to live by them. And they have the added grace of the gospel to strengthen them. But it is also true that Christian ethical principles have validity for men as men and both their claim and their wisdom should be offered to all. Adultery and murder are wrong whether committed by Christians or non-Christians. It is likewise true that lust and hatred are the root forms of these evils the world over.

It is not satisfactory to say that the church may practice *agapé* love but that the world must be controlled primarily by impersonal justice. The responsibility of the state, for example, differs from that of the church and the state may have to administer a community including both Christians and non-Christians. But even there a divorce of justice from love would result in a mechanical equalitarianism, in distributive areas of justice, and in vindictiveness and the desire to get even, in retributive areas of justice.[18] The current stress upon a "responsible society" does indeed focus the prophets' attention on the grim realism of social problems. But

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[18] See Georgia Harkness, *Christian Ethics* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), pages 186-191. for an excellent critique of the duality of love and justice as exaggerated by Brunner and Niebuhr.

a "responsible society" which undertakes warfare to escape tyranny or to establish justice is responsible also for the chaos and tragedy such a war entails even if "successful." It is responsible also for the sad probability of being "unsuccessful." It is responsible for the violation of the principles of both love and justice. A responsible society, as a responsible individual, is responsible not primarily for realism or for relevance but it is responsible primarily for what is right. It is responsible primarily to God, who wills both love and justice. The church is especially responsible for its witness of righteousness. It is certainly not guaranteed success in this witness. In the Gospels, as throughout history, it has clearer promise of persecution and suffering than of success.

The prophetic and ethical function of the church is complicated and varied in its application. It is simple and imperious in its urgency: to make clear and convincing the principles of the kingdom of God according to the revelation of Christ.

The Ministry of Reconciliation

This view of the church's task, phrased first in Paul's classic writing (2 Corinthians 5:16-21), is a good way to sum up her outreach. It involves the gospel of forgiveness which is the heart of evangelism. It involves the twin efforts of prophetic pronouncement and compassionate welfare. It sets the Christian and the church as ambassadors between God and his estranged and wayward children, seeking by all effective methods available to bring about God's intended reconciliation. It sends Christians out from the inner life of the church into the highways and hedges, out into the areas of sore tension and need, to apply there the healing of God's righteous

and redeeming love. The church sends out these ambassadors, whether as appointed specialists on official missions or as lay witnesses in the vocations of the common life, to beseech men on behalf of Christ, "Be ye reconciled to God."

The church is apostolic, but not because of an unbroken line of formal leaders. She is apostolic because, like the early apostles, she is set in the world with an apostolic mission. She is the light of the world and the salt of the earth. She is a city set upon a hill which cannot be hid. She is the Body of Christ, set to fulfill his mission of reconciliation and peace.

Epilogue

We have now surveyed the general foundations of Christian belief in the framework of the apostolic benediction. We have seen the heart and focus of it in the grace of Christ our Lord. In his earthly ministry our Lord revealed the character, and set forward the purposes, of God our loving Father. In the light of this full revelation of the Father we interpret God's eternal nature and his overarching providence. The enduring result of Christ's mission in the world is a new community—the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This fellowship is the ongoing essence of the church. It is bound, as a forgiven and worshiping community, to the redeeming Lord, as the bride of Christ. It is also set, as the body of Christ, in the world as the central agency for carrying on his reconciling work. On these three pillars of basic Christian belief we can now set one remaining feature of our faith.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Christian Hope

THE THEME OF THIS CHAPTER IS GIVEN VARIED NAMES IN outlines of doctrine: future things; things to come; last things;[1] heaven and hell; everlasting life; the coming kingdom; the final consummation; eternity. A simple and characteristic word used widely in the Bible and in current thought is *hope*. The present writer had occasion to observe how characteristically Christian this term is, when translating New Testament writings into the Bura language of northeastern Nigeria. No current word could be found to express it. It was discovered that, in translating other African vernaculars, the same problem was faced; no equivalent for *hope* was found. Some versions alternated between the word for *desire* and the word for *expectation*. It was hard to determine in each case which way to weight the translation.[2]

What Christian hope means is really a combination of the two—desire and expectation. Mere desire is not enough without assured expectation. Expectation is not real hope unless what we expect is desirable. Sometimes an African idiom was used such as "to place within one's heart" or "to set one's eyes upon." We have thus a word full of rich religious meaning. "Though composed of a single syllable, *hope* has a triple reference. It springs from

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[1] *Eschatology* is a technical word meaning the doctrine of last things.

[2] A similar experience was met elsewhere with the Maya language, where "to hope in God" is rendered "to hang on to God." Quoted in Paul S. Minear, *Christian Hope and the Second Coming* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, copyright 1954 by W. L. Jenkins), page 33.

a source, it seeks an object, and it has the wings of wishing. . . . All three of these meanings meet in the person who hopes. Whether his hope is vindicated depends on the simultaneous validity of ground, goal, and good."[3] For the Christian the future outlook, though grim and realistic, is one of hope.

As with the doctrine of the church, the doctrine of Christian hope is one of wide-ranging significance, strong personal and public interest, and sharp difference of interpretation. We shall attempt to find a path through the materials where the light is clearest and where the importance of the truth is most sure.

Some General Observations

It is well to set our hope in the framework of our total Christian faith. Some general statements will serve to clarify the perspective of our future expectation.

Our Hope Is in God

Christian hope rests primarily on the purposes and power of God. Faith in the God of the Bible—in him who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—is the foundation of Christian hope. Any desirable expectation for the future is grounded in the total Christian faith; it is not something alien to be tacked on as an addendum or, as Dr. Minear points out, an afterthought.

> He who is the ground of hope is the Creator of the ends of the earth and the Redeemer of all his creation. . . . Within the scope of his purposes lie all historical happenings, however microscopic or catastrophic. . . . No hope that is contingent on specific social or personal fortune can claim this comprehensiveness; conversely, this hope can never become contingent on a particular sequence of social changes.[4]

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[3] Minear, *op. cit.*, page 18. Used by permission.

[4] *Op. cit.*, page 24.

The Biblical faith that God takes time seriously and works at his purposes within history is so ingrained in all Western thought that it is easy to overlook its peculiar significance in contrast with Oriental and classical modes of thought.

Dr. David S. Cairns speaks of this as the linear view of world events. "The symbol of all pagan views of nature and of history . . . is the circle; the symbol of all truly Christian ways is the line."[5] In this linear view, he argues, we have the secret of the quenchless vitality of the Bible. According to Oriental and classic world views, the events of life go around in cycles. This rotation may be long and complicated, but it is all there is to history. It is a sort of cosmic carousel which takes us on a long whirl and then back to the starting point. "Here is where I came in" is all we can say in our highest moments. There is no future in that. In Western thought, however, this linear view is taken over from the Bible and has become the ground of much thought of the past centuries.

Dr. John Baillie argues at length that the theory of progress is the form this faith in God has often taken. To be sure, it was secularized and was severed from God, who was its original source. "This modern humanism encourages us to regard history as a record of human initiative."[6] In the secularized form progress came to be regarded as automatic and inevitable and history came to be regarded as self-fulfilling. The idea of evolution and Karl Marx's view of the class struggle are other forms of this same general idea of forward movement in nature and in the economic process.

Such wide adaptation and distortion indicates how

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[5] *The Riddle of the World* (New York: Round Table Press, 1938), page 248.

[6] John Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage* (New York: Scribners, 1942), page 82. See also: *The Belief in Progress* (New York: Scribners, 1951), *passim.*

thoroughly imbued our thought is with linear assumptions which stem from belief in a God of purposive action in nature and history. Nihilism, or the loss of hope, in Europe and America is not simply the result of war and the destruction of order. It is the result also of a loss of faith in God—of the subsidence of faith in his control of nature and of history. By the same token, a recovery or a reaffirmation of faith in his providential purposes and power is the basic ground of Christian hope. At the level of personal devotion, as well as at the level of philosophical certainty, this is true. "We have our hope set on the living God" (1 Timothy 4:10). "Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand" (Psalm 31:14, 15).

Christ Came and Will Come

The New Testament hope has two reference points: what has happened and what will happen. In terms of the kingdom of God, John and Jesus came preaching the fulfillment of the times for "the kingdom of God is at hand." As we noted in a former chapter, the whole ministry of Jesus on earth was regarded as the coming of the kingdom. It was at hand then and in the very midst of the people he met. It had come upon them. Yet Christ taught his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come." In terms of the teachings of Jesus, C. H. Dodd is doubtless right in his concept of "realized eschatology." He argues that the parables announce a present fruition.[7] The kingdom of God is a power already released in the world. On the other hand, its beginnings are small and a period of growth is to follow.

Dodd goes too far in denying a future fruition. The parables of the mustard seed (Matthew 13:31, 32) and

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[7] *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet and Company, 1935), pages 175-194.

the sowing of a field (Mark 4:26-29) have their harvest in the future. The parables of the tares and of the dragnet (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50) imply that the full consummation of the kingdom is to come in the future. In terms of the death of Christ this double reference appears in the eucharist. In it we celebrate rites in remembrance of him. We also show forth his death until he comes. Christ died on the cross once for all and finished his work. Yet in our sins we crucify the Son of God again and on our own account (Hebrews 6:6).

In terms of the experience of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost inaugurated an era wherein men were filled with his presence and power. Yet the Holy Spirit is regarded as an earnest and down payment of our salvation (Ephesians 1:14). Our redemption as sons of God also has this double reference: "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). This whole outlook of the New Testament has given rise to the phrase, "between the times." We live between the first advent of Christ which has occurred and the second advent of Christ which is still in the future. In the first advent he overcame evil by his life, death, and resurrection. Yet we are engaged in warfare against evil which presumably will last until the end. Christian hope has two reference points: what has happened, and what will happen. "For in this hope we *were* saved. . . . But if we hope for what we do not see, we *wait* for it with patience" (Romans 8:24, 25; italics are mine).

The Millennial Hope

The pictures of Christian hope are varied and need careful interpretation. All through the Bible and in

Christian thought our expectation for the future has been given in picturesque and symbolic language. To say that it is symbolic or in poetry, rather than literal or in prose, does not mean that it is unreal or false. Many truths can be better conveyed by poetic imagery than by matter-of-fact statement. Children, people of simpler culture, and the inspired writers of Scripture have the gift of using such language and we should pray for the inspiration and discernment to do likewise and to get real truth out of symbolic pictures. Something real is said by the statement, "Righteousness and peace will kiss each other" (Psalm 85:10); or, "The trees of the field shall clap their hands" (Isaiah 55:12).

An early Christian writing pictures the future in these words:

> The days will come, in which vines shall grow, each having ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each twig ten thousand shoots, and in each of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and in every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give two hundred gallons of wine.[8]

This is a picture of plenty, meaning much more than twenty sextillion gallons of wine. In view of the Christian ethic of temperance, this picture means plenty of good things quite other than wine.

The hope for the future in history is sometimes set in terms of postmillennialism, which is briefly described by Dr. W. W. Sweet as

> the belief that the thousand year reign of Christ on earth will come after the gospel has been spread and become effective throughout the world. The condition thus reached will last for a thousand years. In this period the Jews will be converted to Christianity. After a brief but terrible conflict between Christian and evil forces Christ will appear and the general resurrection

[8] This is Irenaeus' quotation from Papias.

and the judgment will follow. The earth will then be destroyed by fire and a new heaven and a new earth will be revealed.[9]

Sometimes this hope is set in terms called nonmillennialism or amillennialism. This is because the thousand-year period mentioned in Revelation 20 is not regarded as referring to a specific period of bliss on earth in the future. Dr. George L. Murray, an exponent of this view, believes that

> the figure of one thousand years represents a definite period of time, measured by and known to God Himself. It is the time extending from our Lord's first advent to the day of His return. It consists of the period during which the souls of the departed saints reign with Christ. That is what they are doing now.[10]

The binding of Satan he interprets in terms of Christ's work on earth and during the gospel age.[11] "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house" (Matthew 12:28, 29). Dr. Murray says further:

> The amillennialist believes definitely in the Lord's return, and in the resurrection of just and unjust at His coming, in the ushering in of the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness shall dwell, when the fires of judgment have purged this world of every vestige of the curse of sin as the ancient world was purged by the flood. The amillennialist believes that the Lord Jesus will set up, not a kingdom of a thousand years' duration, but that his kingdom shall never be destroyed.[12]

A theory of the Christian hope for the future, more familiar to many people, is premillennialism. This theory was elaborated by the Plymouth Brethren in England at the dawn of the nineteenth century and it is worked out

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[9] Vergilius Ferm (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945), page 601.

[10] *Millennial Studies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1948), page 184.

[11] *Ibid.*, page 177.

[12] *Ibid.*, pages 87, 88.

in the dispensationalism of the Scofield Reference Bible. It has also been widely popularized by W. E. Blackstone's book sent out free early in the twentieth century to ministers, missionaries, Sunday-school workers, and Y.M.C.A. secretaries all over the Protestant world. According to Blackstone,

> pre-millennial Christians hold much in common with the Jews, but also that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Messiah; that he is to return to the earth and overthrow Satan, all ungodly government, and lawlessness, and establish a kingdom of righteousness, having the Church, with Himself as sovereign, Jerusalem as the capital, regathered and converted Israel as the center, and all nations included in a universal, world-wide kingdom of pure and blessed government.[13]

Such are some of the schematized pictures of our future hope. There has been no general agreement on interpretations among orthodox Christians. Men of equal devotion to the Bible have differed on this matter, as the above paragraphs indicate. Whatever view we hold, it is important to keep clear that our hope is based primarily on God's purposes and power. It is important also to project our hope for the future and to interpret the Biblical materials from the baseline of the first advent of Christ and from the truth of the gospel which he brought. Further points of caution and guidance will follow in the remaining affirmations.

When Will This Be?

The setting of dates for the fulfillment of our future hopes is a precarious procedure. This is true, in the first place, because of the explicit disclaimer of Jesus Christ himself. "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32; see also Matthew 24:36). Instead

[13] W. E. Blackstone, *Jesus Is Coming* (Revell, 1898), page 37.

of such busy chronological speculation, they were warned, they should "take heed, watch and pray" in the faithful discharge of their work (Mark 13:33-37). In a similar case recorded in Acts 1:6-11, the disciples were told, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

Another reason the setting of dates is inadvisable is that it has been tried so often and with such uniformly mistaken results. Dr. S. J. Case gives a long list of the historical instances of predicting the time of the end.[14] Justin Martyr expected it soon. Hippolytus put it at 500 and Augustine at 1000 A.D. Other Bible scholars, mathematicians, and sectarian groups kept on setting dates: 1260 (because of the 1260 days in Revelation 12:6!), 1365-1367, 1660, 1688, 1689, 1715, 1730, 1734, 1774. In 1827 the Plymouth Brethren predicted it as imminent. In 1830 the Mormons, as Latter Day Saints, began their predictions. In 1843 and 1844 William Miller gave his fevered predictions. On the second failure he gave it up but his followers kept up the calculations. Out of this Millerite influence came the Seventh Day Adventist movement. In the troublous times since the First World War there have been many individual predictions.

This is not to say that the idea of imminence is discredited or that there is no urgency in our work. The unknown aspect of the end of the world does not mean that it will last forever or even that it will still last a very long time. According to scientific estimates the sun transforms into radiant energy three hundred sixty billion tons

[14] James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Scribners, 1921), article on "Second Adventism," Volume XI, pages 282ff.

of its mass every twenty-four hours; and the sun is able to stand this prodigious draft upon its resources for fifteen trillion years to come! That might relieve our minds of any immediate concern for the "heat-death" of the earth! But it still means that it will end sometime.

Present-day tinkering with atomic energy makes us face the conceivable possibility that earthly life could be made untenable any moment by an inadvertence or blunder of man. When we consider present world tensions we also face the collapse of civilizations and cultures. Man's public life, like his individual life, is precariously held together. There are tough durabilities which promise long life. There are also many probabilities of accident which make man's tenure in this world fragile. Chronologically we are nearly two thousand years nearer the end than at the beginning of the Christian era. Thus for each of us and for all of us the end is near. The urgency in the Bible is related to time and to its end but it is set, however, in terms of the responsibility of free choice and moral decision. For men and for nations, "now is the acceptable time; . . . now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Therefore, the king's business requires haste. The passing moments of destiny, as well as the imminent end for each of us or for all of us, give every day a critical urgency.

The Dark Side of the Future

There is ground for pessimism as we view the future of history. This note is clearly struck in the Bible, and clusters around eschatological texts. "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8). "For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will be" (Mark 13:19). "Let

no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first . . ." (2 Thessalonians 2:3). "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching" (2 Timothy 4:3). "For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places, there will be famines; this is but the beginning of the sufferings" (Mark 13:8).

This note of Scripture is easily confirmed by the experiences of recent decades. All about us lie the ruins of blasted social hopes. The temperance movement brought us a saloonless nation indeed, but two taverns—or more—now stand where one saloon stood before. "The evangelization of the world in this generation" flourished as a missionary slogan from 1886 to 1927. That prodigious missionary endeavor still leaves us with more non-Christians in the world than there were in 1886 and with great waves of resistance to the gospel as it comes from the West. A war was fought to end war in 1916-1918 and a quarter-century later a new holocaust engulfed the world. The nations which had agreed to outlaw war were at each other's throats again with illegal wars. There is ground for pessimism.

In the forms of Christian hope, account must be taken of the recent eclipse of any pervasive belief in progress such as marked the nineteenth century. We live in a world which believes in the "decline of the West"; which believes that man may be moral in his personal relationships but that he tends to be immoral in his wider impersonal relationships; and which believes that each new step of progress involves us in some new form of evil. The Bible acknowledges such evil in the world and, according to the parable of the tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43), this kind of mixture of good and evil will continue

until the close of the age. We should be careful, however, lest we confuse the will of God with the evil which men do in their freedom. When we read about wars and rumors of wars (Mark 13:7) we are reading an actuarial statement about man's probable sin, not a prediction of what God wills. We are not reading an order that we engage in such wars. We are reading a caution against alarm, a warning lest we be led astray by false messiahs, and a call to patience and faithfulness. "But he who endures to the end will be saved" (Mark 13:13).

The Bright Side of the Future

There is also ground for real hope as we view the future of history. This note is struck in Scripture and validated in history. The parables of the sower, of the mustard seed, and of the leaven (Matthew 13:1-23, 31-33) imply growth in the kingdom. The Lord's Prayer sets our petition for us: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." The promise of Pentecost is for power to witness to the ends of the earth. The power and debt of the gospel are for the Jew and the Greek, the wise and the foolish. The growth of the church and the course of Christian missions through history validate the truth of the Christian ethic and the power of the gospel. Despite opposition, persecution, and martyrdom, despite coldness, disloyalty, and apostasy, the church has endured and the gospel has spread. The Bible has been translated into over a thousand tongues. Men have experienced moral and spiritual renewal in their individual lives under the power of the gospel. Communities and nations have experienced moral and spiritual renewal in eras of revival and growth.

Who is to say that we have come to the end of such periods of reformation, of renaissance, of enlightenment? Is it not inherent in the incarnation that God means well

by history and that he still has blessings to bestow before the end? God is the ruler yet. Hope for the future is not an illusion based on the overworking of our glands. It is a religious conviction about God and the purpose of the incarnation not invalidated by the course of events. Our view is not inevitable progress, to be sure, but not inevitable decline either. One is as liable to be false and illusory as the other. To say dogmatically, for example, that war is inevitable develops a defeatist attitude which blocks the efforts for reconciliation which can and ought to be made. We are not helpless objects on the tide of events but men responsible for peace and goodwill.

The argument from the "wave of the future" is what led many Germans into the Nazi movement. Dr. Kenneth Latourette sets forth a view of history as a series of waves with periods of advance and intervals of recession.[15] This takes account of both hopeful and discouraging events. He indicates that by area and by influence there has been net growth in the history of the church. Each wave of advance has surpassed the former one. No interval of recession has gone below former ones. The total picture is one of advance through storm. If we are now in a period of recession, the present line of decline need not be projected to the end. One might as well stand in Detroit, looking south across the river into Ontario, and insist that the United States is north of Canada. In any case it is our assignment to work and to witness, to pray and to be faithful, "always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Surely Archbishop Temple is in the true line of

[15] *The Unquenchable Light* (New York: Harper, 1941). He traces four great eras of advance with the period 1815-1914 as the latest. Each of them grew out of an era of recession. At the time of each revival, no era of advance would have been predicted from the trend of events.

prophecy as he envisions from such labor a world taking shape, much like our own and yet how different!

> Still city and country life with all their manifold pursuits and interests, but no leading into captivity and no complaining in our streets; still richer and poorer, but no thoughtless luxury, no grinding destitution; still sorrow, but no bitterness; still failure but no oppression; still priest and people, yet both alike unitedly presenting before the eternal Father the one true sacrifice of dedicated life — the Body broken and the Blood outpoured; still Church and World, yet both together celebrating unintermittently that divine service which is the service of mankind.[16]

Our Spiritual Warfare

There is a real moral struggle going on in the world, moving toward ultimate destiny. History is seen in the Bible as a dramatic conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil. It is not merely an economic struggle issuing in the survival of the fittest. It is not primarily a political or military struggle in which nation makes war against nation for power and advantage. All of this is under the moral governance of God. There is a moral order in which "whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Therefore, "we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

While the Bible affirms God's sovereignty, it is realistic enough to discern in the world much resistance and opposition to his moral demands. It is also dualistic enough to take seriously the distinction between right and wrong. There are forces of evil which are powerful and elusive realities of the spiritual world. In the economic

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[16] William Temple, *The Hope of a New World* (New York: Macmillan, 1942), pages 124, 125.

realm and in the political realm there are prejudices, ingrained attitudes, cumulative resentments, and passions which are vividly and accurately called principalities, powers, world rulers, and spiritual hosts of wickedness. The history of nations and the biography of individuals is profoundly seen to center in the moral struggle against these forces. Jesus regarded his ministry as such a struggle against Satan and these forces. His temptation (Mark 1:13), his healing work (Mark 3:20-27), his training of the disciples (Luke 22:3, 31), and his teaching of the truth (Mark 4:15) were all viewed as part of this struggle. The success of his disciples' mission was regarded as the fall of Satan like lightning from heaven (Luke 10:18).

We do well not to regard this as primitive superstition but as a profound interpretation of human history and experience. In this light we can understand Christ's death and resurrection as a victory in the vanquishing of evil. We can look forward to long years of further struggle and contending against these powers, although since Calvary and Easter they have been more than matched.

The outcome of this struggle involves judgment and destiny for men and nations. As we noted in chapter eight, there is no assurance that the triumph of good implies complete victory in every case. In view of the freedom of man and the law of the harvest, the triumph of good is a vindication of the good as good and the judgment of evil as evil. We are sometimes too glib in consigning men to hell. And we easily become overly curious about its combustion chambers. But the judgment it represents is real, severe, terrifying, and fixed. The Bible is concerned to awaken in us a sense of moral responsibility before God. It is in the realm of decisions made in this moral struggle that our destiny is fixed. Dr. Charles Gore makes clear

how, even at the worst end, this moral significance of our destiny obtains.

> Finally lost souls, only so by their own persistence in refusing the known good and choosing the evil, I feel bound to believe there will be. . . . But I conceive that the lost also will recognize that the mind of God toward them was only good.[17]

Beyond This World

Our hope within history is set in the framework of our hope beyond history. The Christian faith, as we have seen, is one whose center is literally "out of this world." It is a faith with supernatural dimensions. The doctrine of creation puts the origin of the world and of man beyond the created order. The image of God in man puts his center of gravity outside himself. The Christian especially is one whose citizenship and commonwealth are in heaven. This otherworldliness gives no warrant for irresponsibility in this life, as the mission of Christ and of the church make clear. But history is not self-fulfilling and it is from heaven that we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20).

This Biblical perspective is often overlooked in the robust naturalism and growing secularism of modern life. Death is obscured by fevered activity and entertainment. Funerals are replete with flowers, and the harshness of the gaping grave is softened by grass carpet. The departed ones are placed in impressive mausoleums where they are assured of "perpetual care." But death is still the grim reaper, and the inescapable fact of life. In war and in traffic accidents he intrudes his gaunt hand into the gay years of youth. It is still "appointed for men to die once" (Hebrews 9:27).

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[17] Thomas Kepler, *Contemporary Religious Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1941).

This world is not enough to satisfy the need of man, for God has set eternity in his heart. Man faces perennially the ancient question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14). If we move from the personal life and death of the individual to that of nations, cultures, and history, we find the question especially sharpened in recent decades. So long as men believed in the endless duration of the physical world and the law of conservation of energy, they might hope in the future of this world. When the individual died he could sit as an immortal in the balconies of heaven and watch the ongoing progress of man. He could join the "choir invisible whose music is the gladness of the world." But now the scientists speak of the law of entropy and conclude that the universe is running down. This world is not enough. Since the discovery of nuclear energy it is man's intenser fear that the world will blow up. Neglected scriptures have relevance once more; such as "the time has grown very short" (1 Corinthians 7:29) and "the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire" (2 Peter 3:10).

If there is to be an inevitable end of this world, however remote, we need another hope. Cultural immortality is not enough, for culture will come to an end. Family or racial immortality, whereby we live on in our grandchildren, is not enough, for all our sons and daughters are threatened with extinction. It is precisely here that the Christian hope fits in. It speaks to this condition, for it is tied to another world. It looks to the things that are unseen, and the things that are unseen are eternal. The Christian life is an amphibious operation. It works on land and sea. It is like traveling by air, where the shoreline between land and sea makes no difference, for this is a mode of travel which rises above

the difference. The Christian hope is called eternal life. This dimension of life can be entered in this world. "God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son has not life" (1 John 5:11, 12). "Our commonwealth is in heaven."

This perspective makes life meaningful and coherent, as the Venerable Bede records from 627 A.D. when a monk tried to persuade an English king to accept the Christian faith. One of this king's officers made the following impressive plea:

> The present life of man upon earth, O King, seems to me, in comparison to the time unknown to us, like to swift flight of a sparrow through that house wherein you sit at supper in winter with your ealdormen and thegns while the fire blazes in the midst, and the hall is warmed, but the wintry storms of rain or snow are raging abroad without. The sparrow, flying in at one door and immediately out at another, whilst he is within is safe from the wintry tempest; but after a short space of fair weather he immediately vanishes out of your sight, passing from winter into winter again. So this life of man appears for a little while, but of what is to follow or what went before we know nothing at all. If therefore this new doctrine tells us something more certain, it seems justly to deserve to be followed.

Jesus Christ Is the Lord of the Future

This brings us at once to the center and content of our Christian hope. It also brings us to the center and content of the Christian faith—to Christ, the author and finisher of our faith.

We start with his resurrection. His resurrection from the dead is the vivid ground of our hope for the future life. "We too believe, and so we speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence" (2 Corinthians

4:13, 14). Every book of the New Testament declares or assumes that Christ rose from the dead. This witness is validated by the fact that the sabbath of the Christians was celebrated on Sunday, the Lord's Day. It is confirmed inescapably by the living fact of the church itself. One cannot otherwise explain why a group of disciples who were defeated by the crucifixion should so suddenly become bold, joyous, and enduring. They had seen the Lord alive. The resurrection faith is something more than the widespread belief in immortality. To be sure, men have always had this as the "soul's invincible surmise." Primitive men had it and set vessels and objects in the grave with a loved one. The great mind of Plato was busy setting forth proofs of the immortality of the soul. Present-day studies in extrasensory perception and experiments in psychic communication seek to assure us of survival after death. All of these attest to the hunger and the surmise, but they find their answer in the robust certainty of Christ's own resurrection.

This belief in the resurrection also assures us of an adequate personality in the future life. Psychological studies show how interconnected are the relationships between body and mind. It is hard to see how a disembodied soul can experience anything called life. But the Christian hope is set in terms of resurrection. The same God who gives us life now will, it is believed, give us a new instrument of personal life. Paul calls it a "spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:44) and assures us of an adequate house to live in, "so that by putting it on we may not be found naked" (2 Corinthians 5:3). The resurrection of the body, affirmed in Christian creeds, is not to be taken as a crude reproduction of the present physical life, but rather that God will give us a new personality, an instrument adequate for recognition, for communication

and fellowship, and for full participation in eternal life.

We relate the consummation to his return. Some Christians focus so much attention on the advent of Christ at the end that they leave the impression that he is really absent from our present life. They thus seem to minimize his real presence "where two or three are gathered together" in worship; or his real presence in the rich intimacy of the Lord's supper; or his real presence when in giving a cup of cold water in his name we are giving it to him; or his real presence in our whole Christian life—"Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

Other Christians focus so much attention on these recurrent comings of Christ that they obscure the coming of Christ at the end time. The Biblical words for his coming, whether *presence, revelation,* or *appearing* (in Greek: *parousia, apocalypsis,* or *epiphaneia),* are flexible enough in their meaning that they can be applied to any real experience we have with Christ. But this does not obscure the hope that the consummation at the end time will be related in a real way with a fresh and distinctive encounter with Christ the Lord of the future. The pictures and images in which it is set forth are vivid figures of speech but this is not to obscure but rather to affirm the hope of his final appearance.

The final judgment will be determined by his standards. The idea of the divine judgment is part of the structure of the Old Testament. In the New Testament this expectation is centered in Christ as Son of man. The work of judgment was related to his first advent (John 3:19; 9:39; 12:31). He spoke repeatedly of the standards of present conduct which will determine ultimate judgment (note especially Matthew 25:31-46). But the summary judgment is set at the end time and Christ himself will be the standard for the great assize. It is the

Christian belief that the ethical revelation at the first advent will be the criterion for the last advent. At no point is it truer that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

There is much mystery attached to the consummation and to the future life. But it is the worst of errors to interpret the pictures of the end time in a way which violates the ethical standards of Christ's first advent. We should interpret prophecies about the kingdom of the future in terms of the kingdom brought to hand by Christ's first advent. He will be the kind of king then that he was willing to be the first time. His judgment will be severe then, as it was the first time. But the sharp two-edged sword which he is to bear proceeds out of his mouth (Revelation 1:16). The King and Judge will still be the Servant and the Lamb.

The essence of eternal life is the fellowship of his presence. As to the nature of the future life, the language varies and is, of necessity, physical and figurative. But "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50). These are figures to set forth spiritual realities. Beyond the golden streets and the jasper walls, beyond the gates of pearl and the river of the water of life, heaven will be marked by spiritual delights and rewards. There will doubtless be rest for the people of God—not sleepy inactivity but surcease of sorrow and temptation. There will doubtless be activity as his servants go about their tasks. There will be the delight of knowledge when we shall understand fully, even as we have been fully understood. But the real heart of heavenly experience will be fellowship in the presence of Christ, the Lord of the future. That is our hope for heaven and our comfort on earth. "Let not your hearts be troubled. . . . I will come again and will take you to myself, that where

I am you may be also" (John 14:1-3). It is a profound assurance that to be in fellowship with Christ in this life is both a foretaste and a guarantee of being in his fellowship forever.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

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In addition to the references in the footnotes, attention is called to the following list of books. They open up the current discussion of the Christian faith as a whole. The authors write from various viewpoints, as indicated partly from their denominational backgrounds. The inclusion of their works does not imply agreement with all of their positions. The present author's own viewpoint should be clear from the above chapters. Readers may wish to use several of these volumes at a time for comparative study of Christian beliefs. By such study the great common affirmations will be clarified. Differences of viewpoint will have to be resolved by renewed study of the Bible and by fresh thinking under the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

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Index

Studies

in

Christian Belief

by

William

M.

Beahm

The Brethren Press

Studies in
CHRISTIAN BELIEF

These studies were prepared as one of several two-hundred-fiftieth anniversary volumes of the Church of the Brethren. This has always been a noncreedal church, regarding the New Testament as the only and sufficient rule of faith and practice. She has, however, had a constant interest in Christian doctrines as set forth in the Biblical sources. She has carried on her work in the framework of evangelical Protestant beliefs. This general framework has been marked recently by ferment, questioning, and re-affirmation. The Church of the Brethren, like other churches, is under challenge to clarify and re-assess both her own distinctive emphases and the total outlook of her faith. Such encounter with the great common affirmations of Christian belief will help us to see our faith as one for today and tomorrow, as well as one for yesterday. The body of Christian belief is set forth in these studies along the main outlines inherent in the apostolic benediction: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:14).

Of this volume, Paul Minnich Robinson, President of Bethany Biblical Seminary, says: "Here, then, is a book for all. Laymen will welcome it as a clear and forthright statement of the Christian faith. Pastors and teachers will find it invaluable as a study guide for classes. Young people will profit from its use in discussion groups. It will serve as a manual for studies in the meaning of church membership and Christian experience. But what is most important, it will give to all who read it a clearer understanding of 'the faith once for all delivered to the saints,' and a deeper appreciation for the high calling which is the Christian Way."

Studies in Christian Belief

by William M. Beahm

The Brethren Press

About the Author

William M. Beahm, the author of these studies, is Dean of Bethany Biblical Seminary, where he is also Professor of Christian Theology and Missions. He was born in Virginia from two lines of Brethren parentage. His father, I. N. H. Beahm, was from the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia and his mother was Mary Bucher from eastern Pennsylvania. In his youth, he was nurtured in the Christian tradition of Brethren Pietism as embodied in home and church.

Dr. Beahm received his B. A. degree in 1920 from Manchester College, where he majored in history and English. He received from there an honorary D. D. degree in 1940. His B. D. work was completed at Bethany Biblical Seminary in 1922. From the University of Chicago he received the M. A. degree in 1932 and the Ph. D. degree in 1941. He studied also at Garrett Biblical Institute and at Northwestern University.

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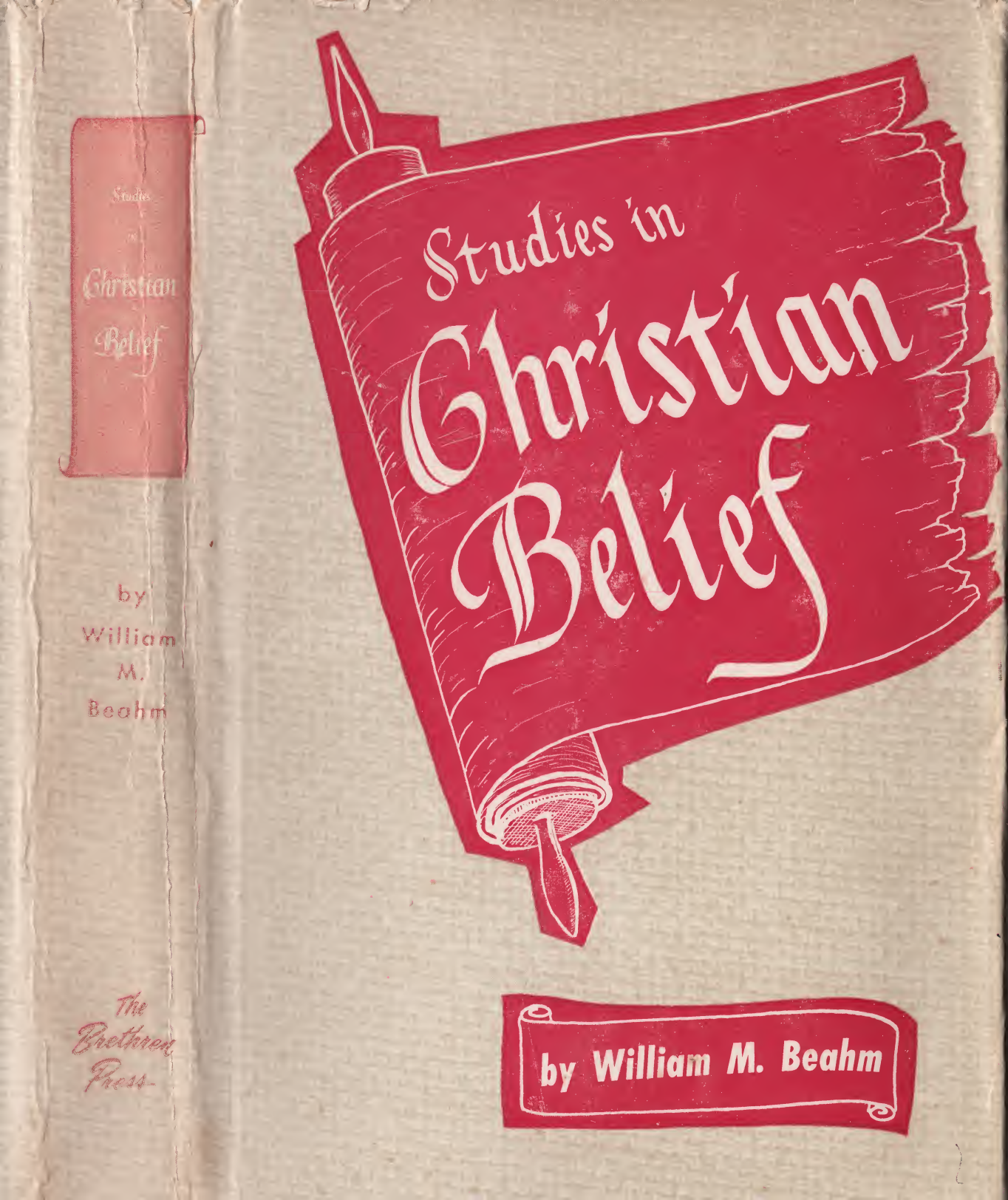
While a graduate student he served one term as the secretary of the United Student Volunteers of the Church of the Brethren. This was followed by a year as traveling secretary for the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions. He spent the years from 1924 to 1937 as a missionary of his church in northeastern Nigeria. Since 1938 he has been on the staff of Bethany Biblical Seminary; as dean since 1944. He has served his church as Annual Conference secretary (1942-1953), as Annual Conference Moderator (1954), and as a member of the General Brotherhood Board (1946-1950; 1957—).

Dr. Beahm was editor and chief translator of the New Testament published in the Bura language of Nigeria in 1937. He has contributed articles to denominational journals and chapters in several books such as *The Church Today and Tomorrow* (1947), *Brethren Builders in Our Century* (1952), *Brother Bonsack* (1954), *Like a Living Stone* (1955). He is the author of two pamphlets on the sacraments: *The Brethren Love Feast* (1943) and *The Meaning of Baptism* (1952).

"Writing from his own Pietistic background, the author has nevertheless interpreted Christian doctrine with the clear understanding of the best theological thought from the time of the early church until the present day. With his remarkable gift for expression, and his unfailing sense of humor, he has been able to present profound ideas in simple and understandable language. He has avoided the peril of speaking in unintelligible 'theological tongues.' Written out of his own deep religious faith, and a lifetime of Christian experience, the book becomes more than a study in doctrine. It is also a testament of devotion."—*Paul Minnich Robinson, President, Bethany Biblical Seminary.*

Jacket and cover designs by Paul Dailey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